

Urban Renewal Assessment, Vision, and Action Steps for the Gateway Corridor Project



Draft – June 2011

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***Town of Amherst &
Amherst Redevelopment Authority***

***Urban Renewal Assessment and
Vision and Action Steps for the Gateway
Corridor Project***

June 2011

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Acknowledgments

The Urban Renewal Assessment and Vision and Action Steps for the Gateway Corridor Project was made possible through the collaborative efforts of many individuals, organizations and agencies.

To be provided by Client

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1. Overview

In the spring of 2011, the Town of Amherst and the Amherst Development Authority retained the services of ACP Visioning+Planning, in association with Fuss & O'Neill, Karen M. Cullen, Kim Littleton, and Seth Harry and Associates (referred to together as the Team) to prepare the *Urban Renewal Assessment, Vision and Action Steps for the Gateway Corridor Project*.

The program consisted of three tasks:

1. Developing and conducting a public participation process for the creation of a vision for development of the Project area;
2. Drafting a Gateway Project Vision and Action Steps to bring the project to fruition; and
3. Assessing the Gateway Corridor Project area with regard to its eligibility for creation and approval of an urban renewal plan and project area under the provisions of M.G.L. 121B.

The Study Area

The image to the right shows the original boundaries of the Gateway corridor study area. To the east and to the west the study area is surrounded by solid and viable residential neighborhoods. To the north it borders with the University of Massachusetts campus. To the south it borders with a transitional area that includes a variety of uses, mostly commercial, reflecting downtown Amherst's expansion northward.

The Gateway project expands on key directions for the community identified by the town's Master Plan, adopted by the Amherst Planning Board in February 2010. Specifically the project respects applicable principles established in the Master Plan, with particular emphasis on: redevelopment, intensification, and mixed-use development; diversification of the tax base and increased access to goods and services; the strengthening of a sense of place; the offering of a range of housing choices; the encouragement of socially and economically mixed neighborhoods; high design quality; transportation choices, including walking

and bicycling; and coordination with local institutions and neighborhoods.

The study was prepared with a public planning process that involved residents, business owners, interested citizens, property owners, and public officials. It confirmed the tremendous potential of the Gateway area to establish a link between the Amherst town center and the University of Massachusetts, add housing and mixed use choices, protect existing neighborhoods, and create a vibrant new center of activities that complements the town center.



PLANNING PROCESS

The *Urban Renewal Assessment, Vision and Action Steps for the Gateway Corridor Project* was developed upon a foundation of information gathered through an inclusive public and stakeholder involvement process. It was also developed through the collection of data – photos, street dimensions, oblique photography, and mapping – gathered through site visits and GIS based information.

The process began in March of 2011 with a day-long session with Town of Amherst staff and representatives of the Amherst Development Authority. The event included a walking tour of the project site.

It continued with the gathering of soft data – opinions, impressions, and visions of the area from stakeholders and area residents. It included field visits to evaluate the physical conditions of the area with respect to character, mobility, and urban renewal eligibility. It concluded with an interactive three-day charrette that weaved together input from the public and relevant data.



Oblique and street level photography was used to analyze neighborhood character, development patterns, and streets and buildings conditions.

PUBLIC PROCESS

The public engagement process leading to the Gateway corridor Vision included two steps: stakeholder interviews and a three-day charrette.

The Team conducted structured interviews with stakeholders directly affected by the Gateway project. Stakeholders included Gateway corridor property owners; residents of the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the corridor; residents of neighborhoods further away from the corridor; the downtown businesses community; and University of Massachusetts representatives.

The three-day charrette included a hands-on design workshop held on April 28, an open house held on April 29, and a presentation of the results held on April 30. These activities were linked to one another; the Team utilized the results of one activity to structure the next.

During the design workshop, participants working in facilitated small groups redefined the boundaries of the Gateway corridor; made suggestions regarding the type, location, and intensity of potential development; and summarized and presented the results of their work.

The results of the design workshop were used to prepare three alternative development schemes. During the open house, participants reviewed the scenarios and made written comments. The Team utilized this feedback to develop the vision for the corridor.

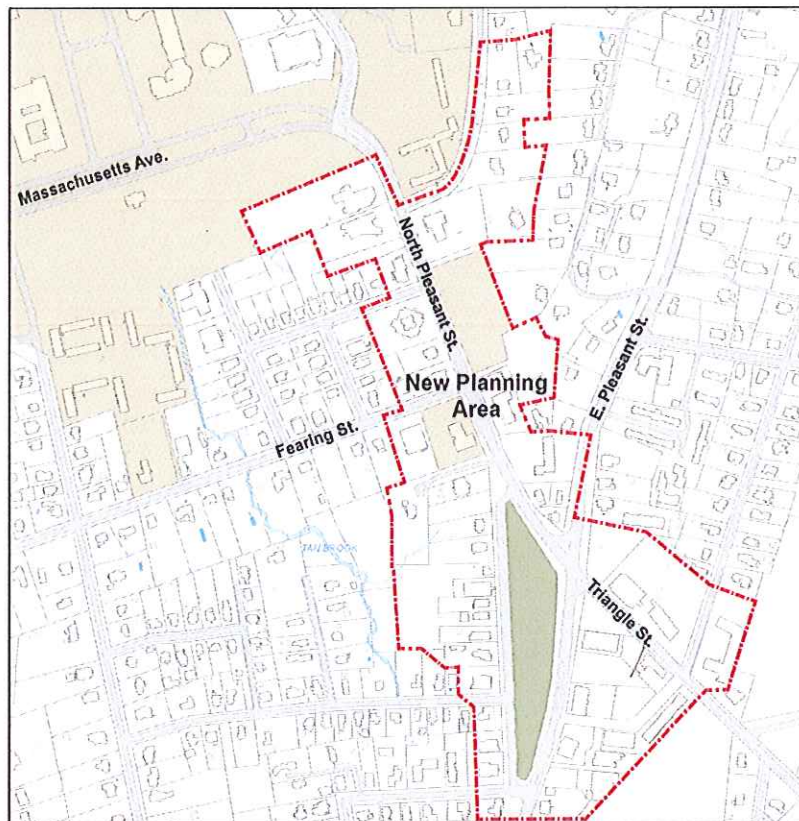
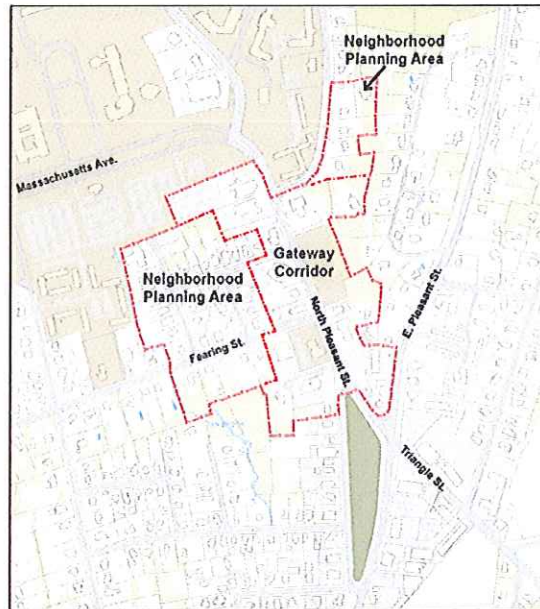


From the top: Participants presenting group work during the hands-on design workshop; commenting on the three alternative schemes for the Gateway corridor; and discussing the preliminary findings of the urban renewal assessment.

SITE BOUNDARIES

The original Gateway area included properties on both sides of North Pleasant Street, beginning at the intersection of East Pleasant and Triangle Streets and proceeding north to the southeastern entrance of the University of Massachusetts campus—a distance of approximately 1,800 linear feet. The boundaries were modified and expanded during the hands-on workshop.

Two major modifications were recommended. The “neighborhood planning area” west of North Pleasant Street was excluded from the study area. The “neighborhood planning area” to the north and east was accepted and included. The study area was dramatically expanded south of the intersection of East Pleasant and Triangle Streets to include: Kendrick Park in its totality; a row of buildings to the west of the park; the triangular area bordered by East Pleasant Street, Triangle Street and the West Cemetery; and a row of buildings to the east of Triangle Street. The proposed expansion turned the Gateway corridor into an uninterrupted link between downtown and the University of Massachusetts campus.



The original site boundaries (top) and the boundaries identified by participants to the three-day charrette.

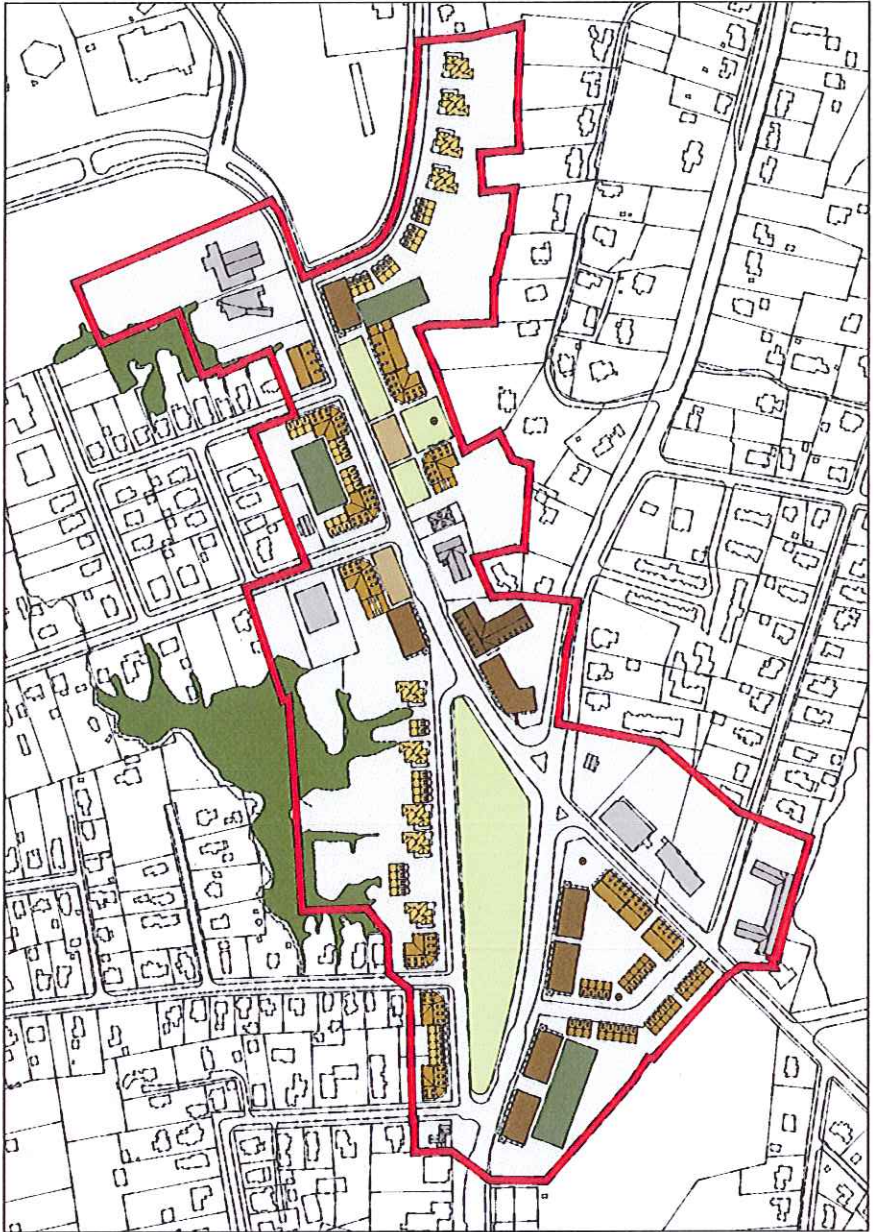
REDEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

The redevelopment concept for the corridor transforms a characterless transitional area into a new distinctive address for the Town. It does so by introducing a rich mixture of residential and mixed use buildings, protecting natural areas, and adding a variety of public gathering areas and new green open space.

The concept deliberately respects the dominant character of the areas it crosses. It maintains the strong mixed-use character of downtown to the south. It creates a dramatic gateway at the crossing of North Pleasant, East Pleasant and Triangular Streets. And, it reaffirms a strong residential character along North Pleasant Street.

The concept adds a total of 290 residential units, 159,287 square feet of retail, 47,970 square feet of office, 44,460 square feet of lodging, and 3.52 acres of open space. The new units are intentionally conceived to be small to attract a desirable mix of tenants—retirees, young couples, faculty, and graduate students. The office and retail mix have the potential to enhance the Town tax base and provide new jobs. The additional open space and the walkable, human scaled nature of the place enhance the quality of life in the surrounding neighborhoods and provide amenities not currently available.

The implementation of the concept is likely to be incremental, and responsive to market and demographic changes. The urban renewal assessment revealed that “nothing in the area demonstrates an unambiguous and obvious case for designation of the area as a urban renewal area.” Therefore, implementation of the vision for the Gateway corridor will require a sustained collaboration between public sector, institutions, businesses, and the community.

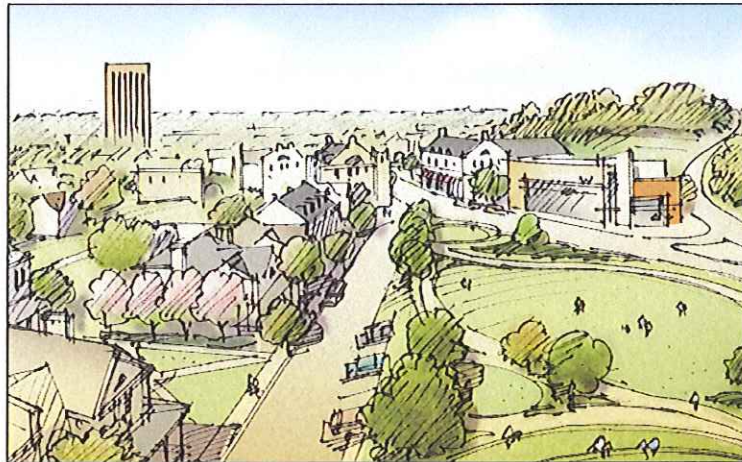


The illustrative map of the Gateway corridor plan.

WHY THIS PLAN?

There are many reasons why the *Urban Renewal Assessment, Vision and Action Steps for the Gateway Corridor Project* is timely and beneficial. These reasons are listed below. The Gateway corridor plan will:

- » Strengthen the Town/University relation both physically and operationally;
- » Attract a different and more adult population to the area;
- » Displace, overtime, sources of nuisance, noise, and problems for the surrounding neighborhoods;
- » Provide neighborhood services, housing choices, employment opportunities all within walking distance of the downtown and the University;
- » Strengthen code enforcement; and
- » Creates a vibrant and diverse signature place.



The three renderings illustrate the type of redevelopment proposed for the corridor.

2. Public Process

INTERVIEWS

The interviews were the first step in engaging the public. They were conducted in groups of five to ten participants. Their purpose was to identify concerns and visions for the future of the Gateway corridor.

Significant points that participants agreed on included:

Concerns

- » Not enough communication between the Town, ARA, and residents about the desirability, full scope, and intent of the Gateway redevelopment.
- » Lack of information on the fiscal impact of redevelopment.
- » Concerns about the UMass campus master planning process and the impact it could have on the neighborhood.
- » Fear of a lengthy and divisive rezoning process.
- » Skepticism that the Gateway redevelopment process may exacerbate problematic conditions that the community has to deal with now, such as:
 - Rowdy behavior on the part of undergraduate students in the evening and on weekends;
 - Noise, litter, the overcrowding of rental apartments, and underage drinking (which has strongly affected the neighborhood to the west of North Pleasant Street);

- The run-down appearance of parts of Fearing, Allen, Nutting, and Phillips streets, which is attributed to poor maintenance of undergraduate student housing by landlords and lax code enforcement by the Town; and
- Heavy pedestrian and vehicular traffic that affects Fearing Street (attributed to the lack of east-west connections between North Pleasant Street and Lincoln and Sunset Avenues).

Visions

- » The potential of multi-generation housing (young families, retirees, faculty and staff and graduate students) both for rental and sale.
- » Balanced mix of uses for buildings, including offices, small businesses, and locally owned shops (with a note of caution to be complementary and not competitive with downtown).
- » The potential to expand on open space opportunities.
- » The opportunity for better institutional coordination and cooperation.

These concerns and visions were compiled into the five baseline principles listed to the right. Those principles guided the development of the Gateway corridor Vision.

Baseline Principles

Diversify Housing

- Housing should be a significant component of any mixed use redevelopment in the corridor, but occupancy by undergraduate students should be strongly discouraged through housing unit design, pricing, and management

Respect Existing Neighborhoods

- The Gateway corridor should serve, stabilize, and enhance the existing residential neighborhoods

Create a Vital Transition

- The Gateway corridor should be a socially, culturally and economically vital extension of the downtown business district and an attractive transition between the campus and downtown

Increase Tax Revenues

- A redeveloped corridor should substantially increase local property tax revenue and increase the diversity of the tax base

Adopt Sustainable Principles

- The design and construction of the Gateway corridor should be done according to sustainable principles, including energy efficiency and responsible transportation

CHARRETTE

The three day charrette included three opportunities for public input and comment: the neighborhood design workshop, the open house, and a final presentation.

Hands-on Design Workshop

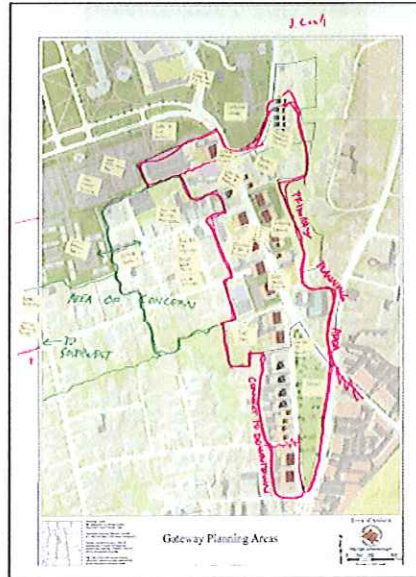
The design workshop was attended by close to 100 residents. The facilitated process included a deliberation on the project boundaries, the proposal of an appropriate mix of uses for the area, and a summary discussion of the pros and cons of what was being proposed. At the end each group made a presentation of their proposal.

The design portion of the meeting was conducted using icons scaled to the map and representing five different typologies: residential townhouses, live-work units, mansion houses, courtyard houses, and mixed-use buildings. The illustration on the facing page shows a facsimile of the handout used by participants.

The presentations and a review of the ten base maps produced by this exercise revealed striking consistency. Emerging similarities included:

- » Expansion of the site southward to connect the Gateway area with downtown;
- » Exclusion of the neighborhood west of North Pleasant Street from the deliberations;
- » Increase in the supply of open space with the creation of a linear park along North Pleasant.

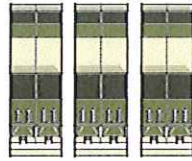
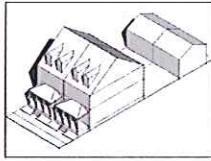
The review of the base maps also revealed differences in the intensity and type of the proposed redevelopment leading to the creation of three potential redevelopment schemes.



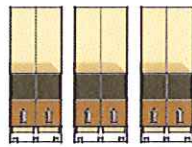
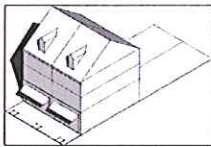
Participants to the hands-on design workshop used base maps and icons to determine project boundaries and the appropriate building mix.

Building Types

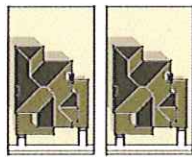
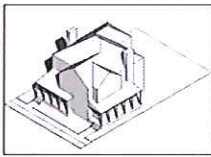
BUILDING TYPES



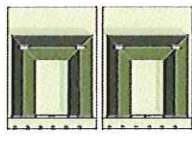
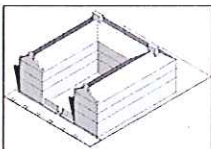
Residential Townhouses are dwellings that generally have two or more floors and are attached to other similar units via party walls. Town houses are best when they have back buildings that increase the privacy. They are usually served by alleys, as front-loaded parking on such narrow frontages destroys the quality and continuity of the pedestrian environment.



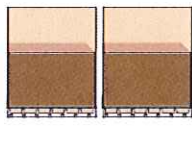
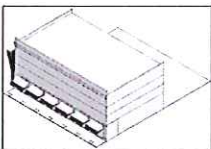
Live-work units are a type of mixed-use buildings, combining commercial or manufacturing space and a residential living space for the business owner within the same structure. They have similar benefits to mixed use buildings and eliminate altogether the need to commute to work. In addition, they can provide affordable work and housing space, meet the needs of special groups such as artists, and serve to incubate new businesses. Parking is typically in the back.



Mansion Houses are multiple-dwelling units built to resemble a traditional single-family mansion. They sit on an individual lot and they are ideal in residential neighborhoods. Mansion houses are consistent with the character of traditional neighborhoods while adding housing choice. Parking is typically in the back.



Courtyard Houses are multi-unit buildings that typically surround a shared courtyard. This three to four story type of building creates a partial sense of enclosure while providing green space which remains visible from the street. It is a building type that older residents and young families with children seek because it provides shelter from areas of intense activities. Parking is typically in the back.



Mixed-Use Buildings, typically three to four stories tall, include complementary uses such as residential units on the upper floors and retail, commercial, and employment on the ground floor. These buildings contribute vitality and interest for residents, additional customers for neighborhood businesses, and a variety of housing choices that make them desirable to first time buyers and empty nesters. In areas where a wide variety of uses are located in close proximity to each other, walking and cycling become practical means of travel. Parking is typically in the back.

ACP Visioning+Planning

Open House

The open house engaged participants in a review of three schemes developed by synthesizing input from the design workshop. Participants discussed ideas with the design team and wrote comments on Post-It notes.

Scheme A proposed extensive commercial mixed-use on both sides of North Pleasant Street.

Scheme B dramatically reduced the amount of commercial mixed-use along Pleasant Street, introducing a more extensive mix of residential building types such as townhouses, live-work units, mansion houses, and courtyard houses. It also proposed the redevelopment of properties along Phillips Street extending all the way to Nutting Street.

Scheme B1 introduced the concept of a linear park along the east side of North Pleasant Street faced by a mixture of townhouses of different sizes and some (limited commercial).

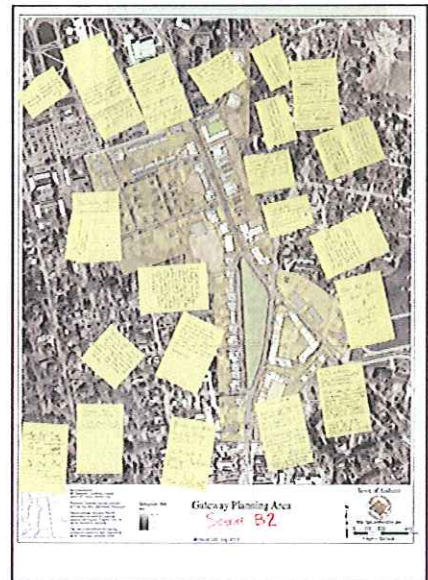
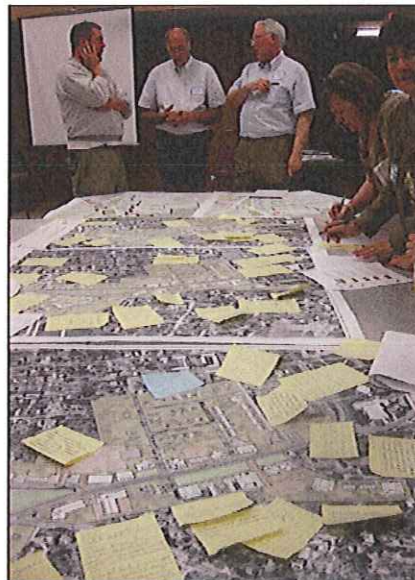
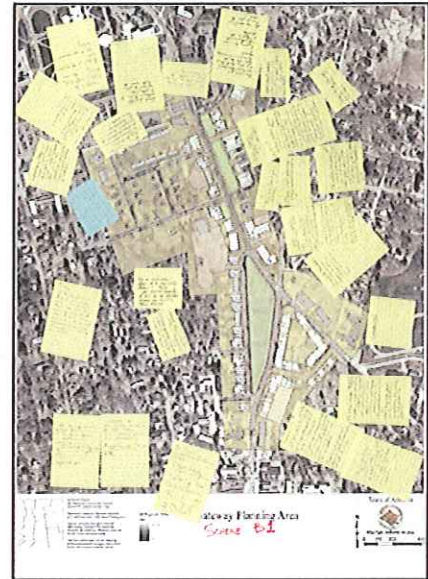
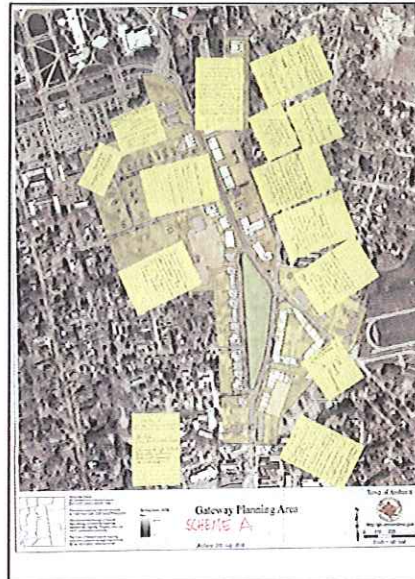
Scheme B2 reduced the size of the linear park and introduced a robust residential mix.

Written comments overwhelmingly supported the reduction of commercial intensity throughout the study area, the introduction of diverse housing types, and the notion of a nuanced set of open spaces throughout the study area, including the linear park.

The redevelopment along Phillips Street intended as a buffer between the neighborhood and the University of Massachusetts was dropped as discussion identified the existence of wetlands that would create a more natural buffer.

These preferences were integrated into the design of the preferred scheme for the future of the Gateway corridor, described in the next chapter.

In the evening following the open house the Team made a final presentation to the community again soliciting comment.



The three schemes presented at the open house with comments posted by participants.

3. VISION

This chapter describes the vision for the Gateway corridor as well as relevant demographic and mobility considerations.

THREE AREAS

The vision is described and organized around three distinctive areas:

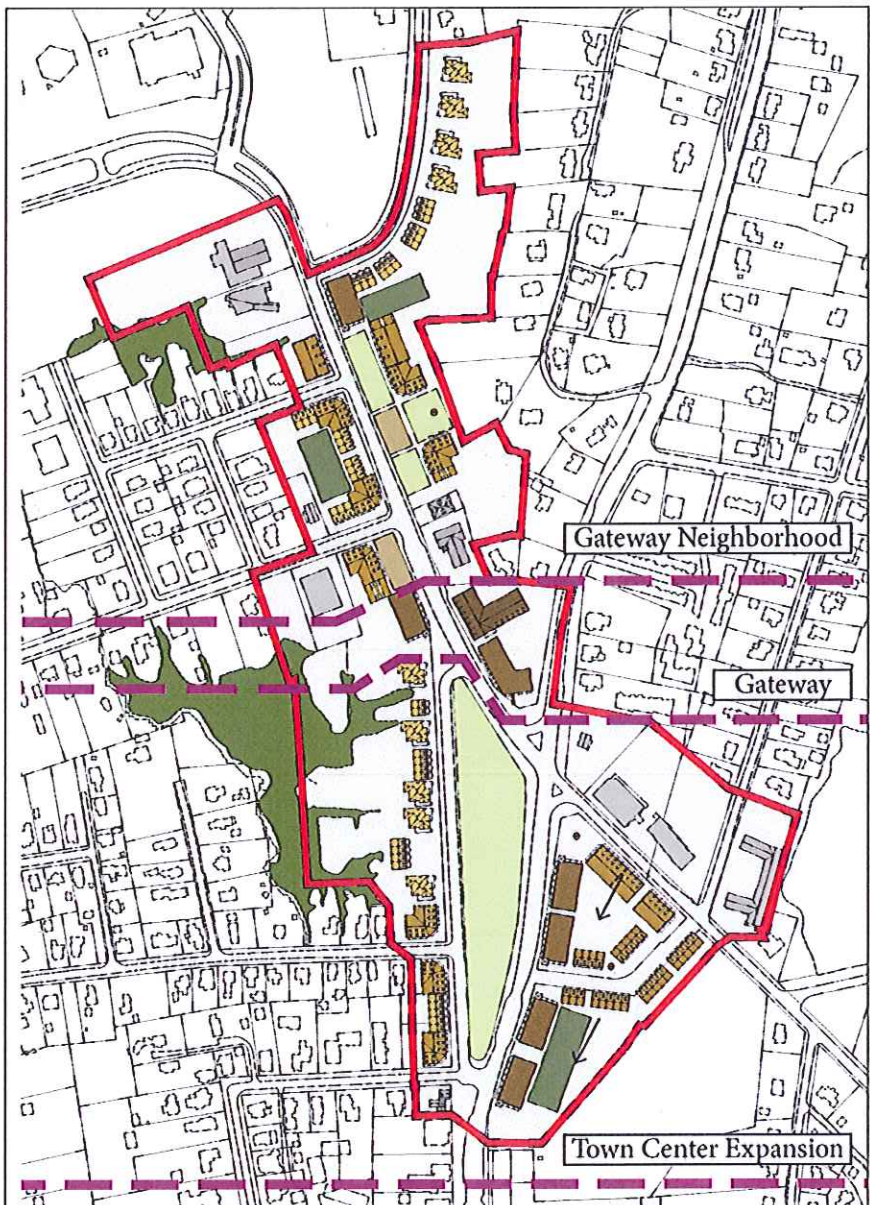
- » *Town Center Expansion*, the southern most part of the corridor;
- » *Gateway*, a dramatic signature place at the center of the corridor;
- » *Gateway Neighborhood*, a new mixed-use neighborhood north of the Gateway.

The vision illustrates what's possible for the Gateway corridor and provides a snapshot of what the area can become in the future.

Existing buildings have been replaced by new ones that are consistent with the mixture of types and uses suggested by participants. This should not be seen as an infringement on property rights.

Implementation of the vision will occur over time and will be driven by enlarge by market forces and by the priorities of individual property owners.

Consistent with this incremental approach, the proposed building types are conceived as flexible buildings that can accommodate different uses, over time.



The three proposed redevelopment areas.

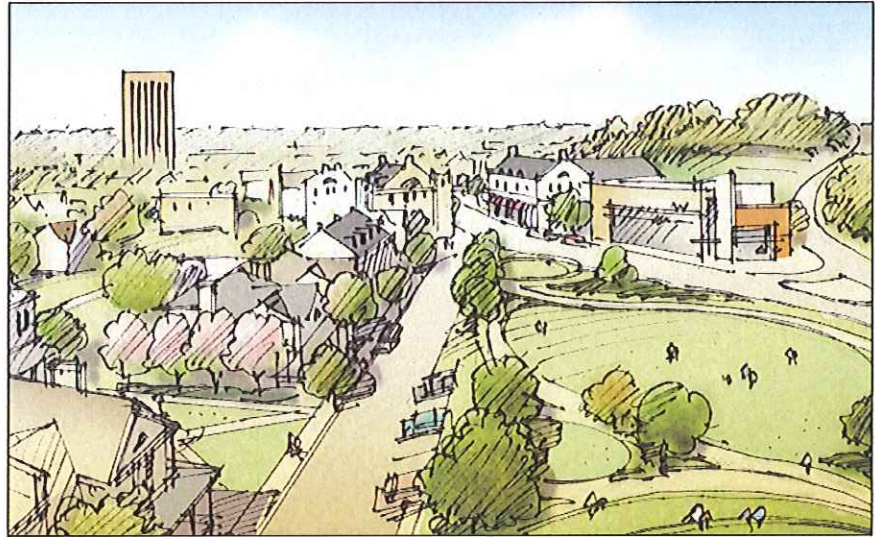
Town Center Expansion

The Town Center Expansion area includes Kendrick Park, a solid neighborhood to the west of the park and a transitional commercial area to the east.

To the west of the park, the vision is to create a strong residential edge that includes townhouses, mansion apartments and live-work units. The residential edge will create a strong barrier to protect the neighborhood the west from commercial encroachments. A small square will create a gathering place and provide amenities such as neighborhood shops within walking distance of the neighborhood. Parking is provided behind the buildings in the form of surface parking. On-street parking should be available along North Pleasant street.

To the east of the park the vision focuses on the triangle created by the intersection of East Pleasant Street and Triangular Street. Here redevelopment recommends a mixture of mixed-use buildings and smaller live-work units. The mixed-use buildings are envisioned as four-story high structures with retail on the ground floor and apartments or offices on the top floors. The live-work buildings have shops or workshops on the ground floor and living quarters above. The vision is consistent with current zoning regulations. Parking is provided off-street in lots on the back of buildings. In the long run a parking structure is envisioned for the southernmost part of the area, which would provide a "park-once" opportunity serving both the new development and the town center.

The Town Center Expansion area will expand northward the distinctive character of Amherst's town center.



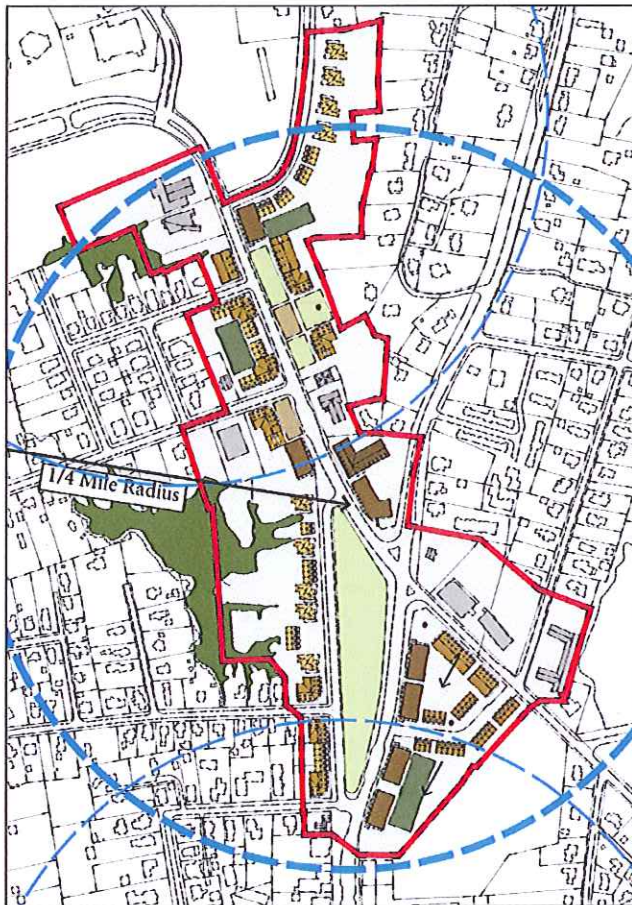
The top rendering gives a view of the new residential edge west of Kendrick Park. The small open gathering place is seen to the left of the picture. The bottom image shows the mixed use development east of the Park and illustrates the scale of proposed redevelopment. The proposed parking structure is visible in the bottom left of the picture. A green roof is suggested on top of the structure. It could be used as a community garden.

Gateway

The Gateway is the area that connects the Town Center Expansion to the south and the Gateway Neighborhood to the north. It includes the tip of a triangle created by the intersection of North Pleasant, East Pleasant, and Triangle Streets.

The vision is to make this area into the core of the Gateway corridor redevelopment—an emphatic civic and visual statement expressed through the formal treatment of a new signature building located at the intersection of East Pleasant and Triangular Streets.

The building could be a meeting facility used both by the town of Amherst and the University. Similarly mixed-use buildings in the area could include University-supportive businesses. A student welcome center was mentioned as something that could be located in this area to introduce students to both the University and the town. The existing hotel is a use wholly consistent with the Gateway and is seen as expanding over time.



The rendering at the top emphasizes the civic and visual nature of the Gateway. The map to the right shows a 1/4 of a mile pedestrian radius centered in the Gateway area.

Empirical evidence shows that if streets are walkable, most people will walk a distance of approximately 1/4 mile (1320 feet) or 5 minutes before choosing to drive or ride a bike. The entire Gateway corridor is contained within an easy 5-minute walk.

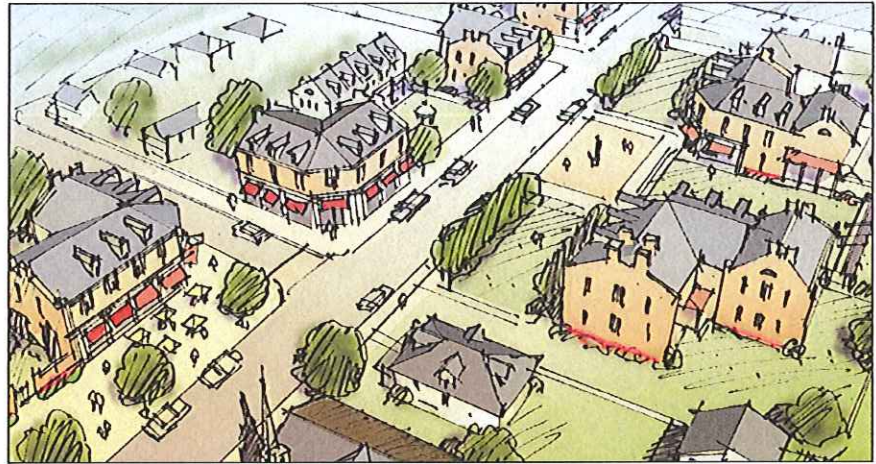
Gateway Neighborhood

The Gateway Neighborhood is the northernmost area of the Gateway corridor and the focus of the original project boundaries.

The vision for the area is one of a walkable, attractive mixed-use neighborhood of medium density organized along both sides of North Pleasant Street. The centerpiece of the area is a linear public park reminiscent of the Town's Green and surrounded by a mixture of live-work units and town houses. A mixed-use building anchors the park to the north, providing an opportunity for neighborhood-oriented retail as well as offices. Parking is located immediately at the back of the proposed buildings. If and when development intensity increases, the plan shows appropriate locations for the creation of one or more parking structures.

An exclusive residential enclave is envisioned along the northern side of Butterfield Terrace, facing the University campus. The mixture of townhouses and mansion homes is designed to attract faculty and staff, graduate students, and retirees who want to live in close proximity to the campus.

A form-based zoning overlay is recommended for this area.

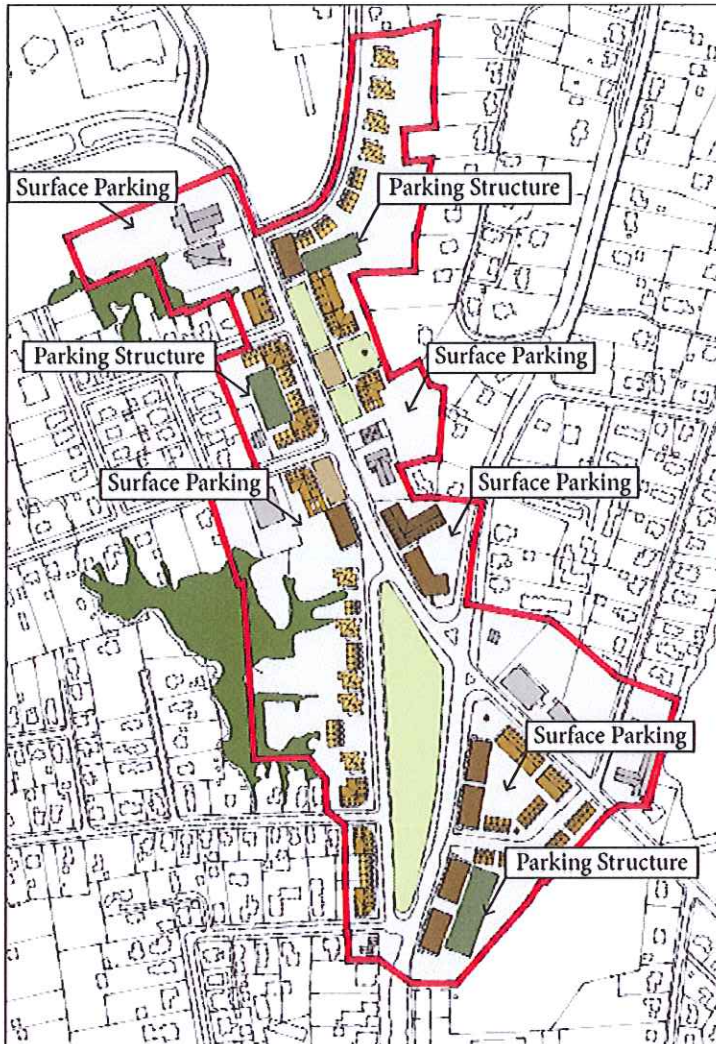


Two different views of the Gateway Neighborhood show the compact and pedestrian friendly nature of the proposed redevelopment, the additional open space provided in the area, and the parking structures.

PARKING

Availability of parking throughout the area was an issue mentioned extensively during the three-day charrette. The vision proposes several surface parking and parking structures throughout the Gateway corridor. The incremental nature of redevelopment in the area will allow for a transition from surface to structured parking, as redevelopment occurs and when needed.

An efficient method for handling parking in the Gateway corridor should be through the coordinated use of shared parking. In a shared parking environment shoppers and office workers can use designated parking spaces during the day while the same spaces can be used by residents at night. The pedestrian friendly walkable dimension of the proposed redevelopment and its mixed-use nature, make shared parking and “park-once” eminently possible.



The map shows the location and type of major proposed parking areas. Smaller parking areas are envisioned behind individual townhouses.

BUILDING AND LAND USE BREAKDOWN


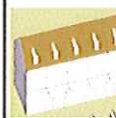

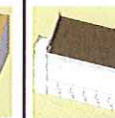
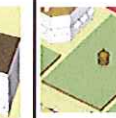
The two diagrams below summarize land use breakdowns.

The vision adds a total of 290 residential units, 159,287 square feet of retail, 47,970 square feet of office, 44,460 square feet of lodging, and 3.52 acres of open space. These totals are estimates and must be seen as a

snapshot of what is possible in the area. The totals can change based on factors such as size of the units and market demand, for example.

Parking requirements were based on the following calculations: Retail or offices 3 spaces per 1,000 square feet of

gross floor area; Residential: 1 space for first bedroom, .5 spaces for each additional bedroom, or 1.5 spaces per unit; and Civic buildings: 4 spaces per 1,000 square feet gross floor area.

		Building Typologies						
								
	Building and Land Use	Residential Townhouses	Live-Work Units	Mansion Houses	Mixed-Use Buildings	Civic Space and Buildings	Total	Parking Spaces
TOTAL GATEWAY	Residential							
	Residential Units	27	30	18	215	NA	290	435
	Mixed-Use							
	Retail Square Feet	NA	25,500	NA	133,787	NA	159,287	478
	Office Square Feet	NA	NA	NA	47,970	NA	47,970	144
	Lodging Square Feet	NA	NA	NA	44,460	NA	44,460	111
	Open Space							
	Park Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.57	2.57	NA
	Commons Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.95	0.95	NA
	Green Roof Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.64	0.64	NA
	Neighborhood Center Square Feet	NA	NA	NA	NA	27,360	27,360	109

Land use totals for the entire study area.

		Building Typologies						
								
	Building and Land Use	Residential Townhouses	Live-Work Units	Mansion Houses	Mixed-Use Buildings	Civic Space and Buildings	Total	Parking Spaces
GATEWAY NEIGHBORHOOD	Residential							
	Residential Units	12	0	8	0	NA	20	30
	Mixed-Use							
	Retail Square Feet	NA	0	NA	7,995	NA	7,995	24
	Office Square Feet	NA	NA	NA	19	NA	19	29
	Open Space							
	Park Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.95	0.95	NA
	Commons Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.95	0.95	NA
	Green Roof Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.64	0.64	NA
	Park Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.57	2.57	NA
	Neighborhood Center Square Feet	NA	NA	NA	NA	27,360	27,360	109
THE GATE	Residential							
	Residential Units	NA	12	0	0	NA	12	18
	Mixed-Use							
	Retail Square Feet	NA	10,200	NA	59,232	NA	69,432	208
	Office Square Feet	NA	0	NA	102	NA	102	153
	Lodging Square Feet	NA	0	NA	44,460	NA	44,460	111
	Open Space							
	Park Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.95	0.95	NA
	Commons Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.95	0.95	NA
	Green Roof Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.64	0.64	NA
	Park Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.57	2.57	NA
TOWN CENTER EXPANSION	Residential							
	Residential Units	15	18	10	0	NA	43	65
	Mixed-Use							
	Retail Square Feet	NA	15,300	NA	66,560	NA	81,860	246
	Office Square Feet	NA	NA	NA	94	NA	94	141
	Lodging Square Feet	NA	NA	NA	47,970	NA	47,970	144
	Open Space							
	Park Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.64	0.64	NA
	Commons Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.64	0.64	NA
	Green Roof Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.64	0.64	NA
	Park Acres	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.57	2.57	NA

Land use totals by the three sub-areas. Both charts show the break down in residential units, square footage, and parking of all the proposed buildings.

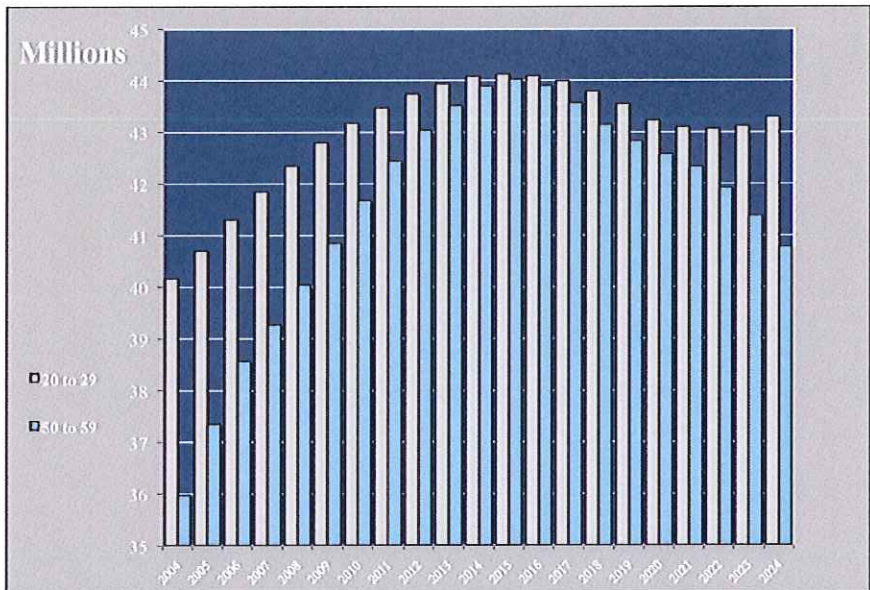
TRENDS

The diagram to the right, shows the demographic convergence of two cohorts, the baby boomers in the age bracket 50 to 59 and the Millennials (the children of the baby boomers) in the age bracket of 20 to 29. The chart shows that in the decade 2011 to 2020 those two age groups will reach their peak.

This demographic convergence has the potential of dramatically transforming how neighborhoods and communities will grow in the future. Residential market surveys indicate that the baby boomers and their children prefer neighborhoods that are pedestrian friendly, that facilitate social interaction and that offer homes that minimize housing maintenance obligations. Those types of neighborhoods do not exist in anywhere near sufficient quantity.

The redevelopment proposed for the Gateway corridor has the physical characteristics (walkability, small housing units, mixed-use) that those two demographics prefer. It therefore has the potential of tapping into this rapidly growing emerging market. That potential is further enhanced by the corridor proximity to the University of Massachusetts. Such proximity is likely to be desirable to empty nesters and retirees seeking life long educational opportunities.

Several national publications have recognized Amherst as one of the top communities in the country with the potential to attract retirees.



This diagram, courtesy of the housing market firm of Zimmerman, Volk Associates, shows at-a-glance the convergence of two demographic cohorts: baby boomer turned empty nesters and their children. Both are seeking a diverse urban lifestyle.

DESIGN FRAMEWORKS

Frameworks improvements across the study area connect and extend existing networks for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic and emphasize open space conservation.

Street Framework

The notion of expanding the grid of streets in the area bound by Massachusetts Avenue to the north, North Pleasant Street to the east, Fearing Street to the south, and the University of Massachusetts' residential towers located southwest of the campus was discussed in several of the interview sessions. Currently Fearing Street and Massachusetts Avenue are the only east-west connections in the area.

An expanded grid would distribute vehicular and pedestrian traffic evenly throughout the area providing alternatives to moving around and reducing traffic congestion. Fearing Street in particular would see a reduction in vehicular and pedestrian traffic alleviating one of the major concerns of area residents.

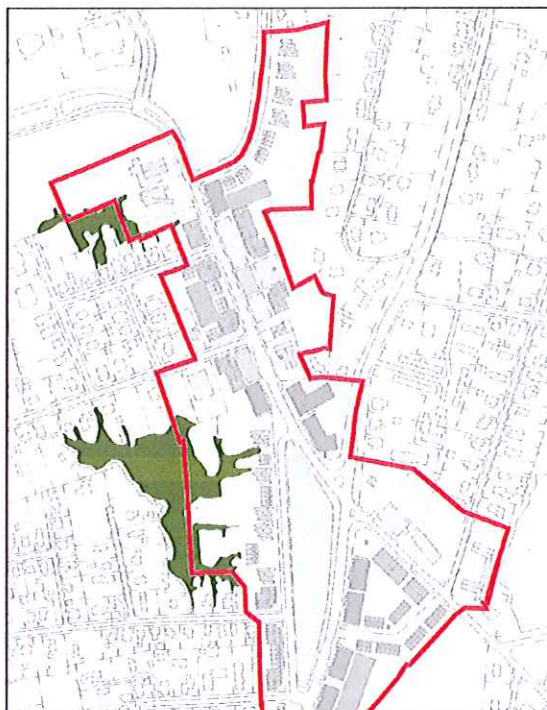
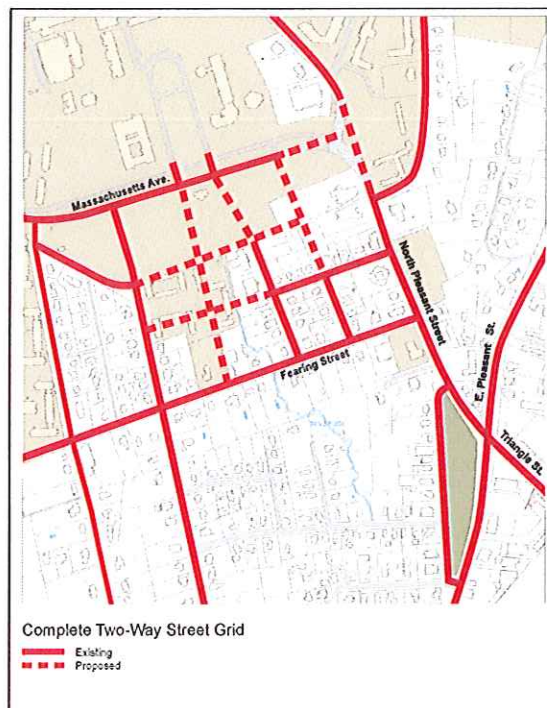
A street plan for the area should be coordinated with the UMass master-planning process currently underway.

Green Framework

As previously described, parks and open spaces serve as amenities for residents and pedestrians throughout the Gateway corridor.

Participants to the hands-on design workshop added the notion of protecting wetland areas and possibly linking them with a pedestrian path. The illustration to the right shows the two wetland areas identified by participants.

The two maps show the proposed expansion of the street grid (top) and major wetland areas within the Gateway corridor (bottom).

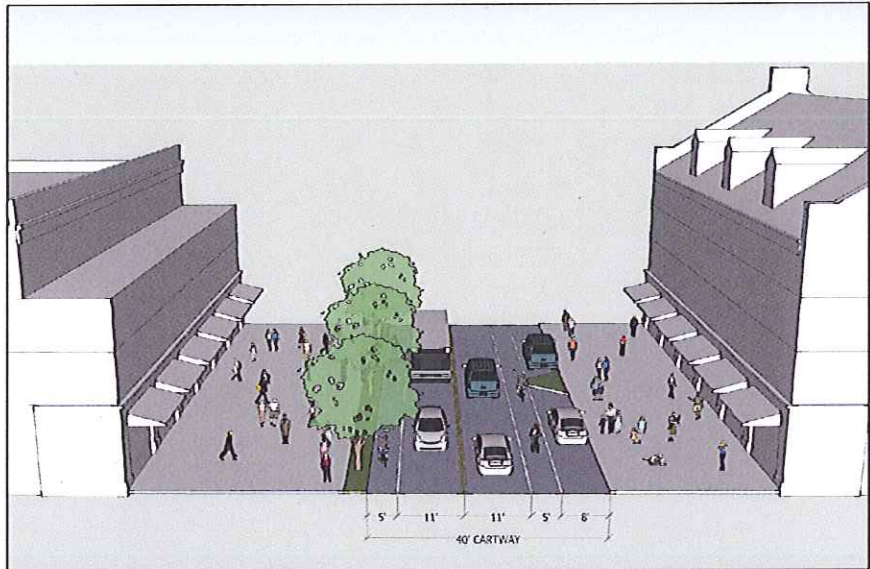


MOBILITY

The Gateway corridor vision is to create an integrated system of multi-modal circulation.

The analysis of existing conditions along North Pleasant Street showed that the street, as currently designed, can accommodate enhanced bike lanes, bus service, a limited amount of on street parking, and improved pedestrian conditions. The latter enabled by enlarged sidewalks created by uniform building set backs and the planting of trees.

Two typical sections are provided. The section on the top shows the street surrounded on both sides by mixed-use buildings. The section on the bottom shows the street with residential buildings on both sides. Both sections use 11 feet vehicular lanes and 5 feet bike lanes. Both sections emphasize the provision of enlarged sidewalks, bicycle paths, and the planting of trees to lend scale, color and shade.



Typical street sections in mixed-use (top) and residential (bottom) conditions.

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4. Preliminary Assessment for Urban Renewal Eligibility

INTRODUCTION

While the vision was being developed, the Team performed a preliminary assessment of the properties within the study area—as originally identified—and made a recommendation as to the viability of using the urban renewal tool available in MGL c.121B to ensure that the overall redevelopment goals for the area were met.

BACKGROUND

Urban renewal, broadly defined, is the process by which a developed area which has fallen into some state of dysfunction is redeveloped or rehabilitated to improve the functionality of the area. Many years ago there was a federal urban renewal program designed primarily to deal with the extreme problems experienced in cities across the country as the national economy changed from urban-industrial to suburban-office/industrial land use patterns. Many inner city areas fell into decay as investments were made in new undeveloped areas, usually suburban. The federal program helped many cities eliminate blighted areas and consequently improve their economies, land uses, and social fabric. The federal program no longer exists. Today, states have the responsibility to administer urban renewal programs, which are often geared toward much smaller and less severe situations than was seen at the national level decades ago.

In Massachusetts, the legislature developed an urban renewal program (MGL c.121B) in an effort to revitalize and encourage sound growth in areas that are substandard, decadent, or blighted open space. Urban renewal projects help municipalities revitalize deteriorated areas by providing the economic environment needed to attract and support the private investment needed to achieve a balanced mix of housing, business, and industry. The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)

Chapter Structure

This chapter is organized in the following sections:

- Introduction
- Background
- Methodology
- Description of the Study Area
- Preliminary Assessment Results
- Recommendations for Next Steps
- Conclusion
- Financing Techniques and Funding Sources

is responsible for administration of the program.

The way the program works is that first, a municipality prepares documentation on an area to show that there are significant conditions that are substandard, decadent, or blighted open area (see definitions of these terms below). Then the municipality can consult with DHCD to get a determination as to whether the area complies with the statute. If it does then the municipality, through its Redevelopment Authority, prepares an urban renewal plan which includes information documenting the existing conditions and the proposed plans for redevelopment. The contents of this plan are discussed in detail in Section 6. Once the plan is approved by DHCD, the Redevelopment Authority can engage in a variety of activities designed to provide the economic environment needed to attract and support private investment in the area.

These activities include planning, establishment of design and rehabilitation standards, acquisition of land which may include taking of land by eminent domain, assembly of land into developable parcels and the subsequent disposition of said land for private redevelopment, relocation of businesses and residential occupants, demolition or rehabilitation of structures, improvements to infrastructure, issuance of bonds and borrowing of money, and receipt of grants and loans. All of these actions facilitate the redevelopment needed to revitalize a community or neighborhood and stimulate sound growth, using both public and private funding sources.

The terms “substandard,” “decadent,” and “blighted open area” are fraught with negative connotations, primarily due to memories of some of the more drastic examples of urban renewal efforts in the 1960’s and 70’s. The actual definitions in the statute are quite lengthy and are provided in Appendix A with other sections of MGL ch 121B, and are summarized below.

A “substandard area” refers primarily to residential areas where there is a predominance of dwellings that, by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light, or sanitation facilities (or any combination of these), create conditions that are detrimental to safety, health, or morals.

A “decadent area” is an area which is detrimental to safety, health, morals, welfare, or sound growth of a community because of the existence of buildings which are out of repair, physically deteriorated, unfit for human habitation, or obsolete; or because diversity of ownership, irregular lot sizes or obsolete street patterns make it improbable that the area will be redeveloped by the

ordinary operations of private enterprise.

A “blighted open area” is a predominately open area with no structures on the land, which because of any one of a number of physical constraints of the land itself or conditions of the infrastructure, render the area detrimental to the safety, health, morals, welfare, or sound growth of a community because of excessive costs to develop it through the ordinary operations of private enterprise.

As will be seen in Section 5, the Gateway Corridor study area in Amherst does not have any areas that meet the definitions of either substandard area or blighted open area.

As stated previously, when a community and DHCD designate an area as eligible for urban renewal under c.121B, it allows the community (or more properly, the Redevelopment Authority) to redevelop deteriorated areas by providing the economic environment needed to attract and support private investment. Property acquisition and disposition is an important component of the tool set described above which enable Redevelopment Authorities to do this. Under the law, Redevelopment Authorities are exempt from the provisions of MGL c.30B, the Uniform Procurement Act, when they are engaged in the development and disposition of property in accordance with an approved urban renewal plan. This allows them to operate more efficiently and thus at lower cost; more importantly, it allows them to utilize other avenues to locate developers who are interested in redevelopment in keeping with the vision and requirements of the urban renewal plan.

Eminent domain is one tool which can be used by redevelopment authorities to acquire property. The two main reasons for use of eminent domain are to acquire

properties which are abandoned and dilapidated and are obviously detrimental to the neighborhood, and to acquire one or more small properties to assemble an area of sufficient size to realistically redevelop the area. It should be noted that state laws require compensation for any property taken by eminent domain, and there is a process which must be followed including obtaining at least two appraisals. The price to be paid for the property cannot exceed the highest nor be lower than the lowest appraised value, which DHCD must approve. In some cases, exceptions to this rule can be made.

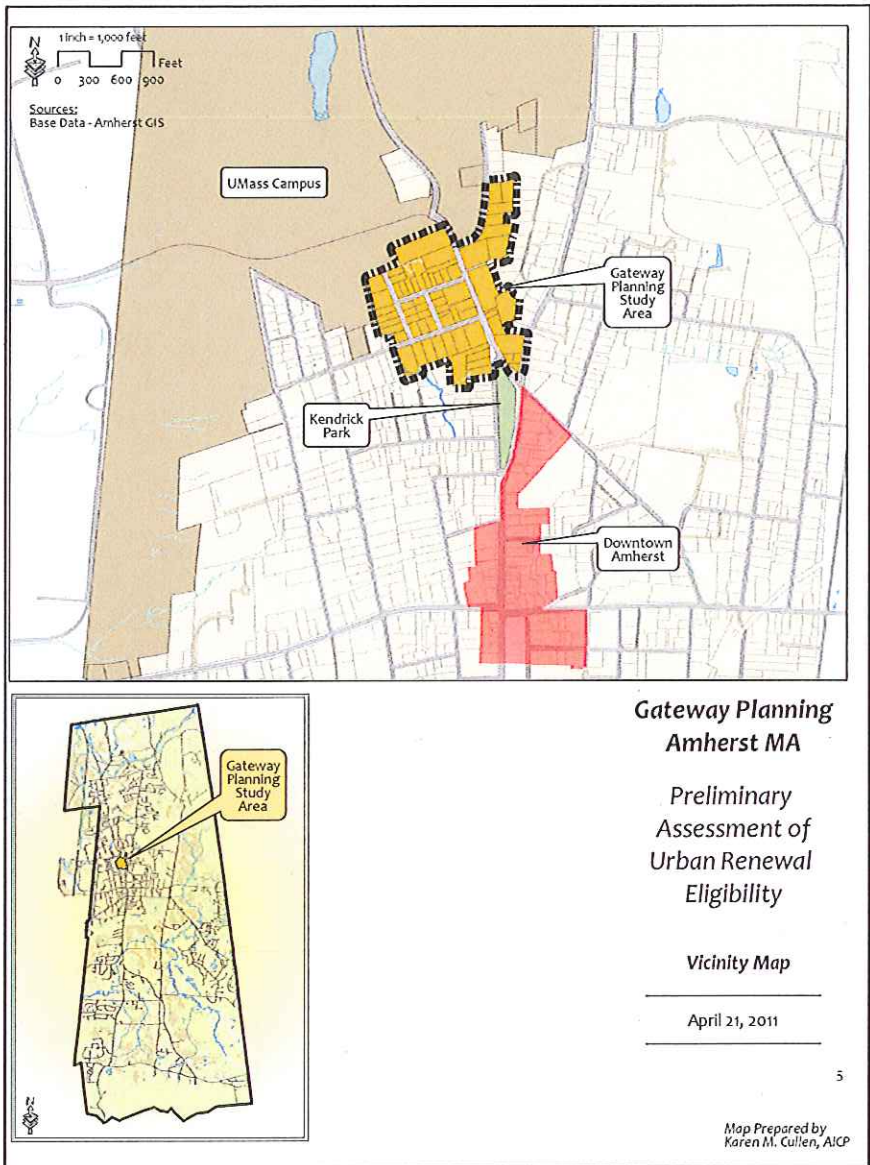
A major effort of redevelopment authorities is to obtain funding through grants, loans, and bond issues to complete infrastructure improvements within the urban renewal area. This includes water supply, sewer capacity, stormwater drainage, sidewalks, bike paths, streets, and streetscapes. Such improvements are often one of the first things to be done, and can prompt property owners to make improvements to their properties, thus increasing property values and the general economic climate. This in turn increases the likelihood that outside developers will invest in the area as well. While many people fear eminent domain, it is certainly not a given and most redevelopment authorities explore all other avenues before embarking on the process.

METHODOLOGY

The Amherst Redevelopment Authority (ARA), after holding meetings and discussions, delineated a study area boundary which was provided at the outset of the study. It was made clear that these boundaries could change as a result of the public participation process, but that the preliminary assessment to determine if urban renewal could be used was to be confined to the study area. This area can be seen in Figure 1.

Research was conducted on the properties within the study area using geographic information system (GIS) data, Amherst assessor data, aerial imagery, and other pertinent information available on the world wide web. A base map was created for use in the field to note particular conditions on the properties and with the public infrastructure in the study area. Finally, the definitions of the terms “substandard area”, “decadent area”, and “blighted open area” from c.121B were reviewed to provide guidance on the preliminary assessment process.

Field visits were conducted in March and April of 2011 to identify properties and infrastructure that exhibited conditions that could be interpreted to meet the definitions of substandard area, decadent area, or blighted open area. Notes were taken and then the data was entered into a GIS database for mapping. Once this was done, a broad assessment was made to answer the initial study question of whether any areas within the study area could be eligible for urban renewal under MGL c.121B.



DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

The study area boundaries were set in preliminary fashion by the Amherst Redevelopment Authority with the assistance of the Amherst Planning Department staff. The area is 30.9 acres excluding roadways and consists of 66 parcels. The area is divided by North Pleasant Street, an arterial connecting the UMass campus with the downtown, with five residential streets providing access to the majority of the parcels. Sidewalks exist on both sides of some of the streets, and on one side of the others. Fifty two of the parcels are currently in residential use, eleven are non-residential, and three are vacant (two of these are in common ownership with adjacent non-vacant parcels). Figures 2 and 3 show the study area, while Figure 4 shows the occupancy for each parcel.

Residential uses in the study area include:

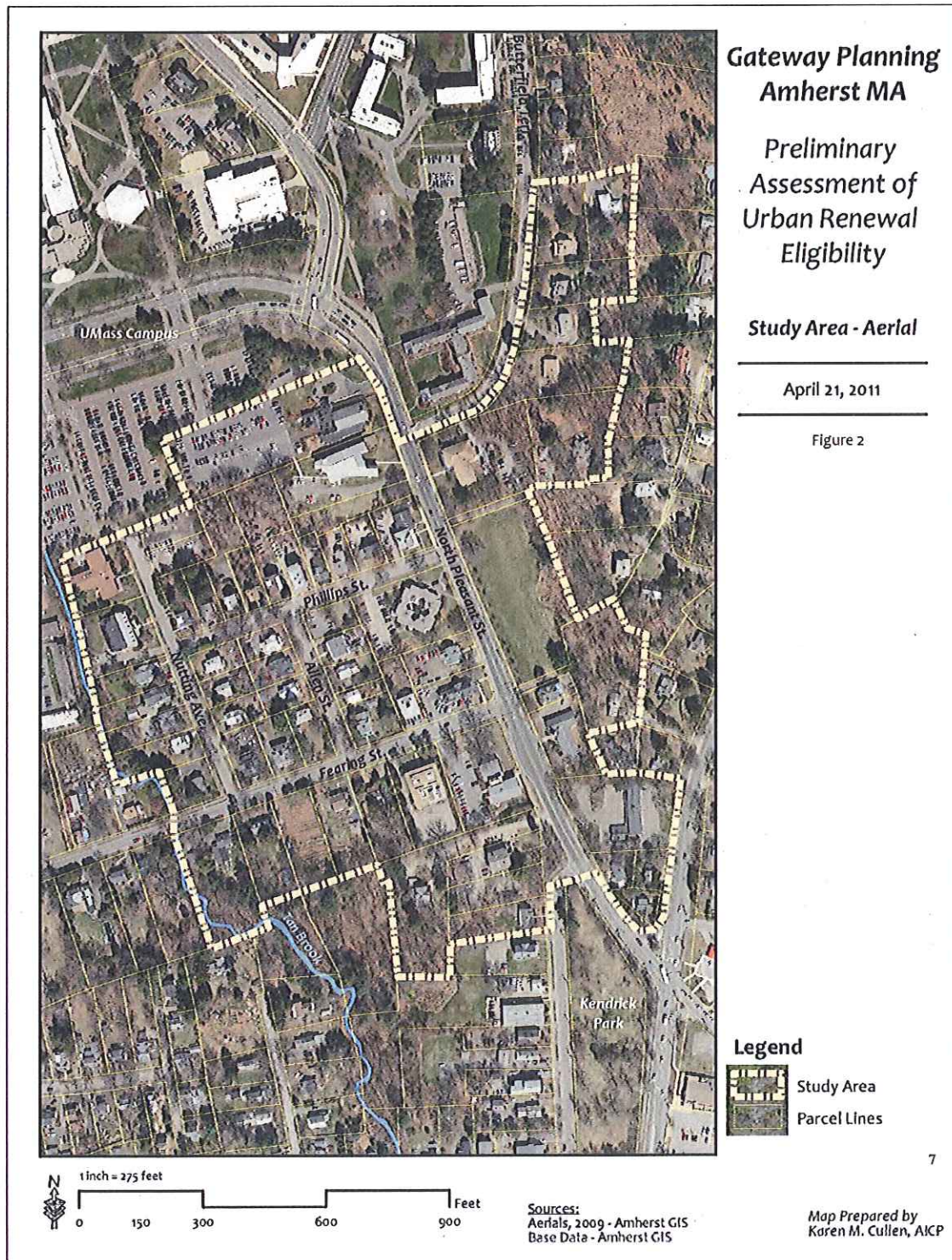
- » Single family detached homes with one family occupying the structure
- » Single family detached homes with several non-related individuals, presumably students, occupying the structure
- » Single family detached homes which have been converted into two or more separate dwelling units (each with kitchen and bath)
- » Apartment buildings with multiple dwelling units, and

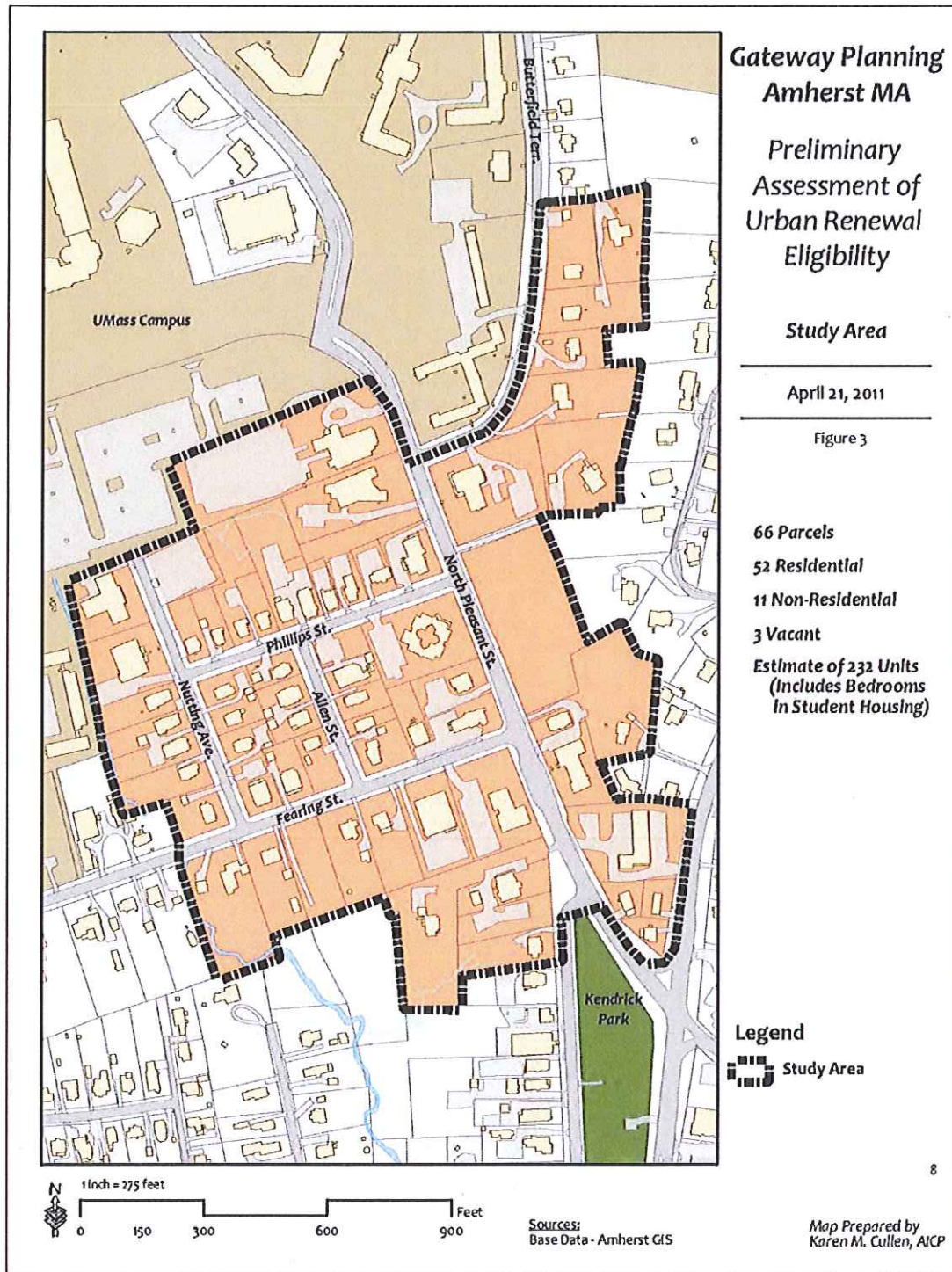
- » Student housing in the form of sororities, fraternities, and dormitory-type housing in a mixed use building (Hillel House).

Non-residential uses in the study area include:

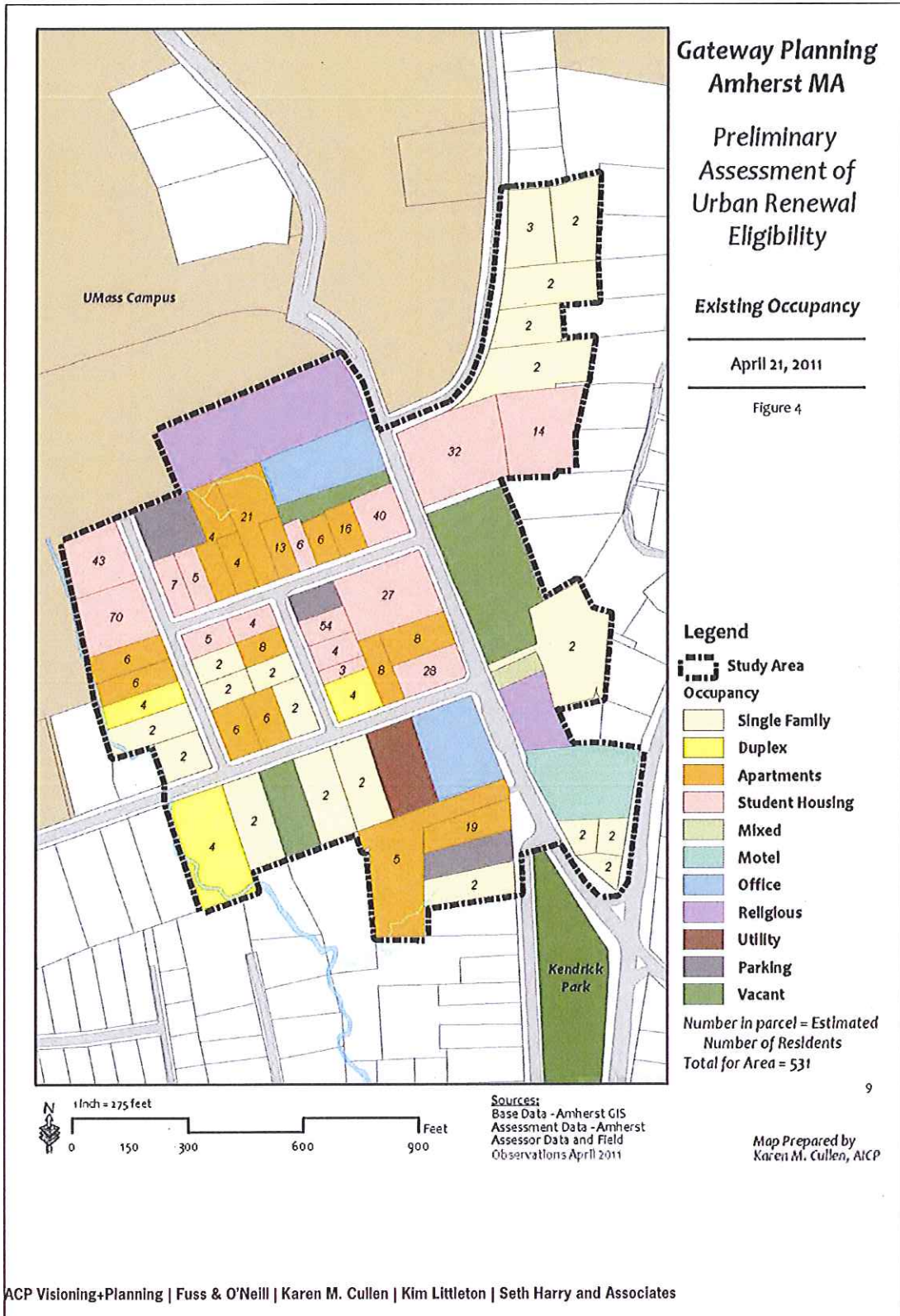
- » Motel with 20 guest rooms
- » Office (including two buildings occupied by University related offices and classrooms, a portion of Hillel House, and a portion of the former single family house adjacent to Mercyhouse)
- » Religious (two churches)
- » Utility (communications facility for Verizon), and
- » Parking lots associated with adjacent residential properties.

Based on the inventory conducted as part of this study, it is estimated that there are 232 housing units in the study area, counting each bedroom in "student housing" structures as a housing unit. The number on each parcel in Figure 4 is an estimate of the number of people living in the buildings on each property; the total for the area is 531. It should be remembered that this is only a preliminary assessment and the estimated units or population on each parcel may be incorrect. This data was gathered to get a sense of whether the area or any portions thereof are overcrowded, as that pertains to the urban renewal statute.





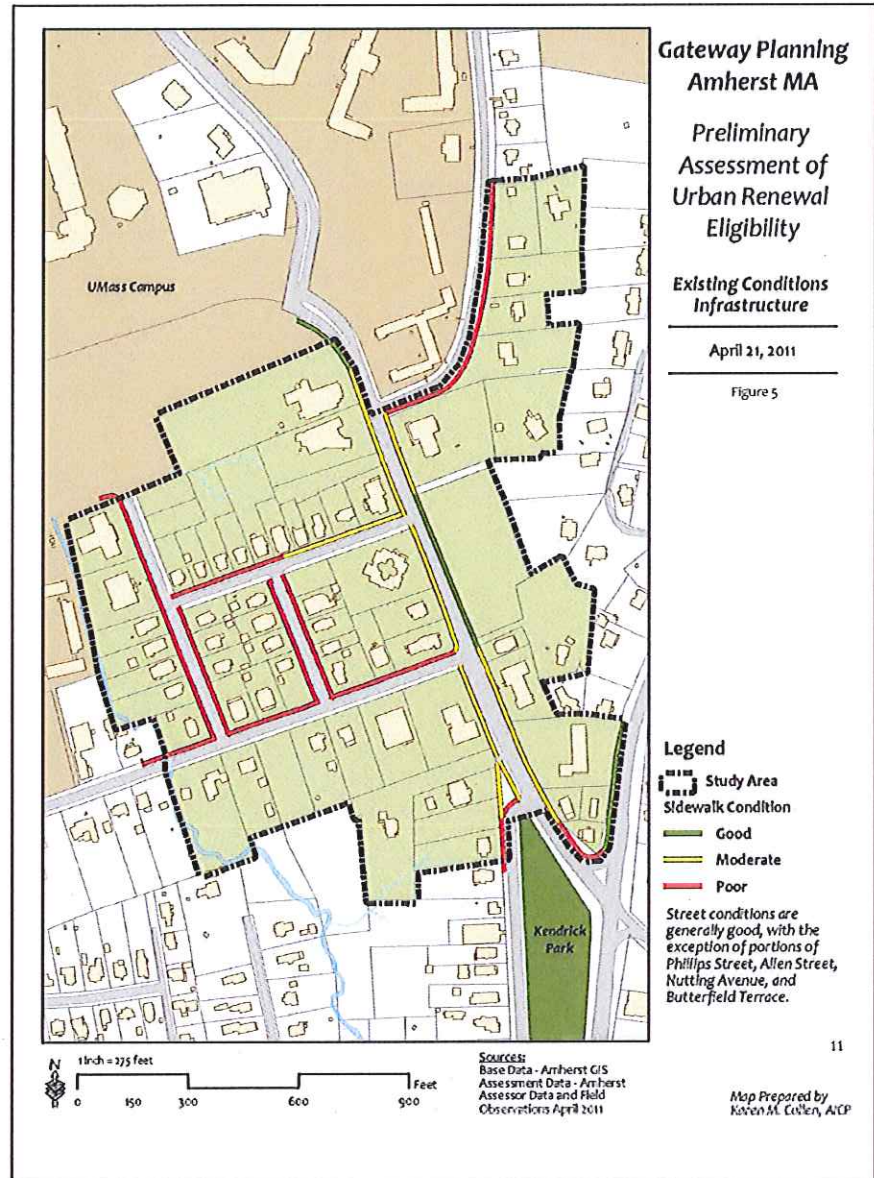
Note: Figure 3 may not properly distinguish between single family homes occupied by a family versus a group of unrelated individuals – based on evidence in the field, categories were assigned to the best of the consultant's knowledge.



PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT RESULTS

A review of the existing infrastructure, including streets and sidewalks, was conducted since it is considered by DHCD when they review the assessment report to determine if the proposed area meets the criteria for designation as an urban renewal area.

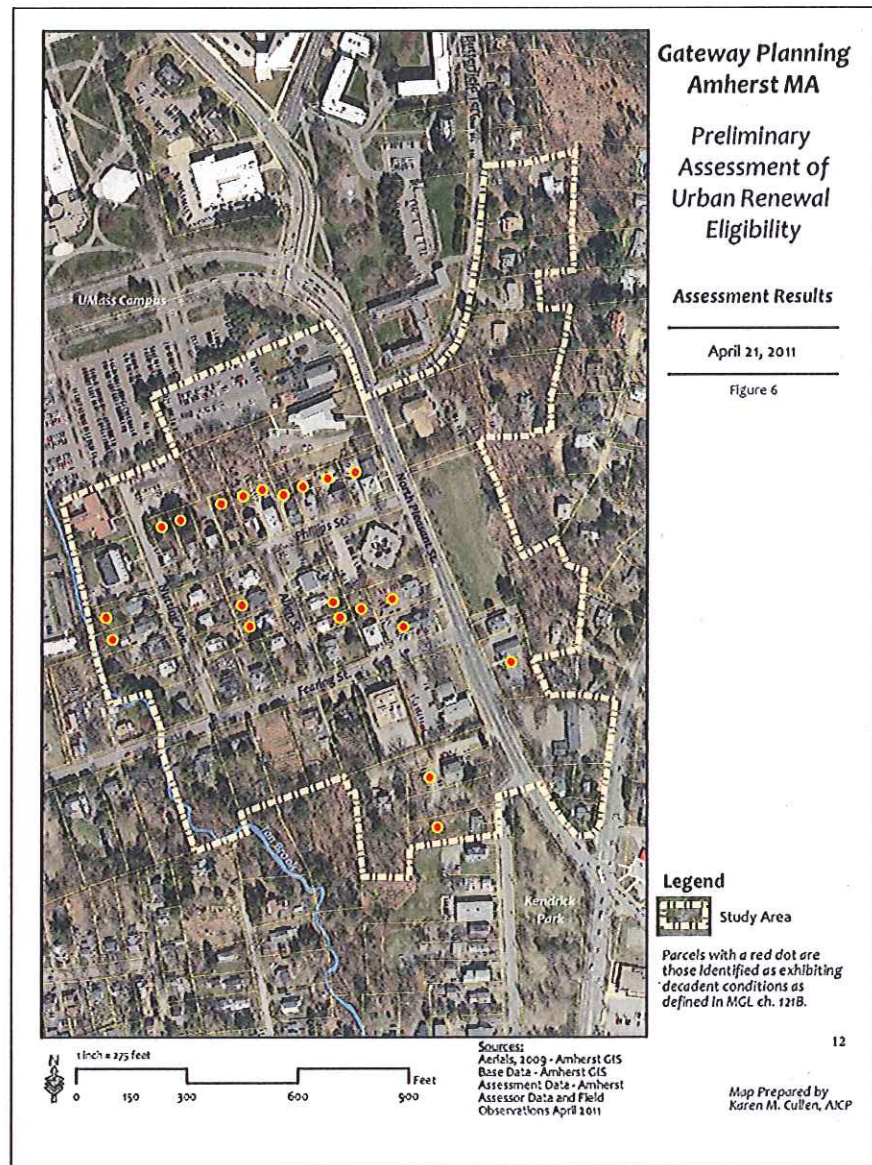
At this early stage in the town's overall planning process for this area, it was assumed that water supply, sewer capacity, and stormwater drainage facilities are all adequate to support redevelopment activities that may take place in the area. Figure 5 shows the existing condition of the infrastructure. Most of the sidewalks in the area are in various states of disrepair, and all but those on North Pleasant Street are narrower than today's standards. Several of the residential streets are in need of repair, with potholes, failing pavement, significant cracks, and signs of poor drainage being noted. The streets with the most significant problems are Phillips Street, Nutting Avenue, Allen Street, and Butterfield Terrace.



The results of the property assessment are shown in Figure 6. Properties with a red dot on them exhibited decadent conditions as defined in MGL c.121B on the days of the field visits. This included buildings needing repair or painting, those with a diversity of ownership, and irregular lot sizes. In all cases, the assessment was made from the public right-of-way, by visual inspection. Specific conditions that led to such a determination included any of the following being observed on a property:

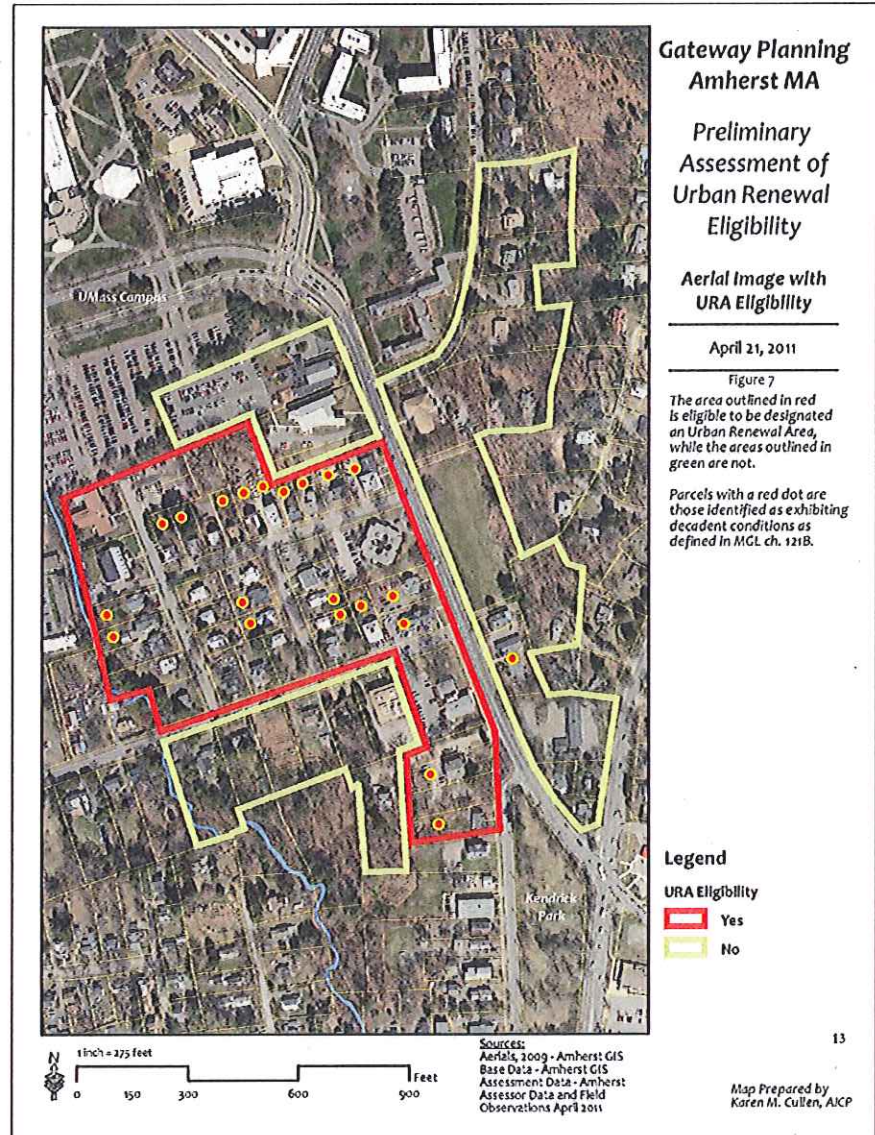
- » broken or boarded up windows or doors
- » broken screens or screen doors
- » broken or missing siding, bricks in need of re-pointing
- » obvious problems with the foundation including bulges or cracks
- » sagging porches or decks, broken or misaligned posts
- » problems with the roof including holes or deteriorated, missing, or broken shingles
- » substantial amount of trash or debris (such as discarded television sets, sofas, chairs, or other furniture) in yards, driveways, garages, or on porches
- » excessive number of vehicles on the property (i.e. cars parked all over the yard in addition to within the driveway or designated parking areas, or more than four cars parked at a single family house).

It should be noted that if a property owner were to clean up and repair such problems with his/her property, the field assessment would change upon a new examination. The data provided in this report relates to the "snapshot"



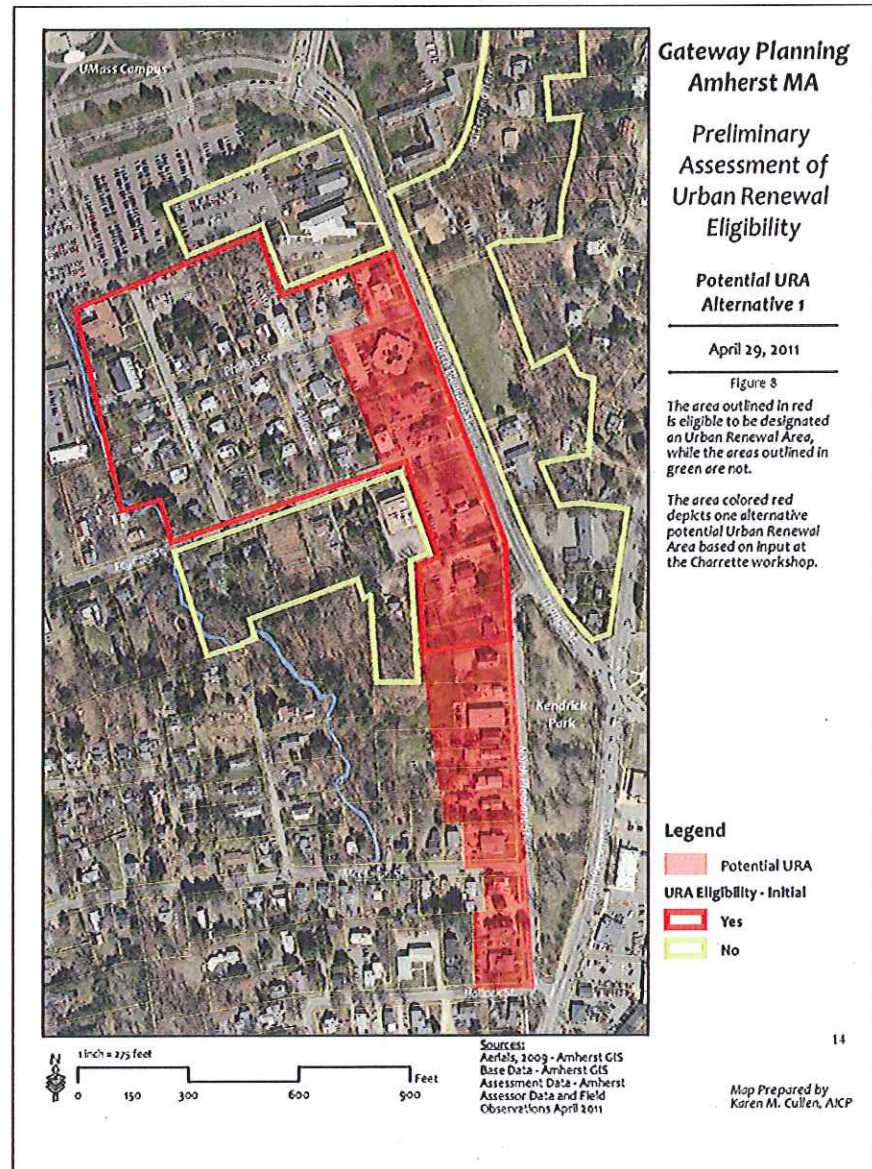
reflecting the conditions at the time of the assessment, and could change when or if a new assessment is conducted.

From this data, a preliminary boundary could be drawn to depict the area that has been determined to be potentially eligible for designation as an urban renewal area under MGL c.121B (see Figure 7). In this figure, the area within the red line was determined to have the highest potential for the existence of decadent conditions as defined in the statute, which would allow the ARA to apply to DHCD for designation of the area as an urban renewal area. The areas within the green boundaries are clearly not eligible for designation because they do not exhibit decadent, substandard or blighted open area conditions.



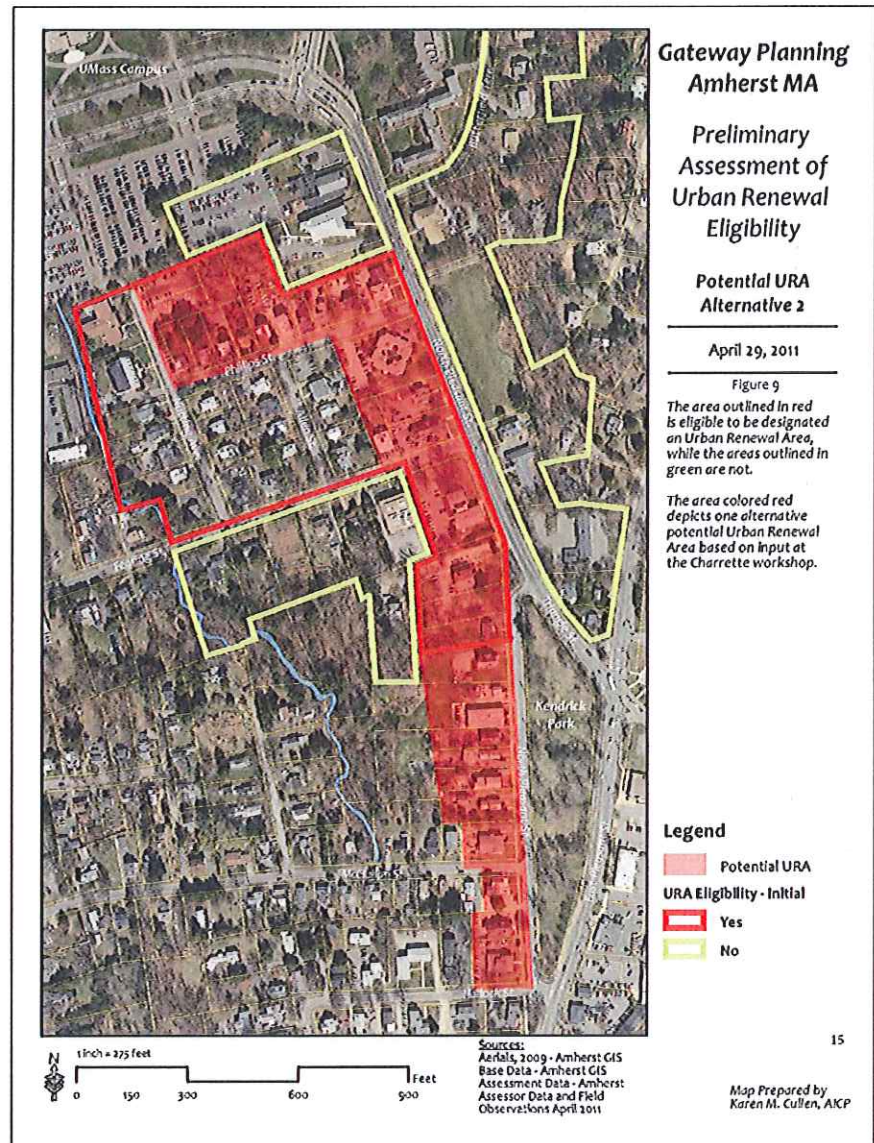
After the workshop on the first night of the public charrette on this planning initiative, it was determined that there was not much interest in including the majority of the neighborhood area west of North Pleasant Street in any planning initiative. In addition, there was quite a bit of interest in extending the boundary of the study area south along the west side of Kendrick Park to the existing downtown area. Therefore, two alternative potential urban renewal boundaries were identified, as depicted in Figures 8 and 9.

In both of these alternatives, the southern area outside the initial area identified (within the bold red outline) has not been assessed in any way, and may or may not have properties that exhibit decadent conditions. In Alternative 1 (Figure 8), the area is tight to the corridor and only includes properties with frontage on North Pleasant Street (with the exception of one property on Fearing Street).



In Alternative 2 (Figure 9), the properties on the north side of Phillips Street were also included, based on the many comments heard at the charrette workshop regarding the poor and overcrowded conditions of most of those properties. However, it was also noted that the neighborhood in general seems to be improving on its own as property owners are beginning to make improvements. But concerns about single-family homes being converted to student rooming houses remain, based on recent real estate transactions in the neighborhood. That said, there is no proof that if students occupy a structure it will necessarily be a detriment to the neighborhood or begin to exhibit decadent conditions. The behavior of occupants is not related to the type, size, or condition of the building which they occupy.

Finally, it is the opinion of the Team that nothing seen during the site visits was so decayed or deteriorated as to demonstrate an unambiguous and obvious case for designation of the area as an urban renewal area. Nothing in the study area was blighted, making the case for designation weak without further supportive data.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

If the Amherst Redevelopment Authority chooses to pursue the use of the urban renewal tool, the recommended actions are:

1. Hire a consultant to perform a detailed analysis of the area, including the properties south of the initial study area along the west side of Kendrick Park;
2. Submit a report to DHCD for a preliminary review to determine if the agency will or will not approve the proposed urban renewal area; and if the answer is yes to that question, then
3. Hire a consultant to help prepare the urban renewal plan, which will take the Vision and Zoning Amendments one step further with more specific recommendations and requirements for redevelopment of properties within the urban renewal area.

If the ARA does obtain approval from DHCD of an urban renewal area designation, the urban renewal plan must follow a standard outline with the following information:

- » Characteristics of the area – plans or maps showing the project area plus its immediate surroundings.
- » Eligibility – the data and report on the assessment for designation as an urban renewal area, plus more detailed information on clearance and rehabilitation where such activities are proposed.
- » Project/plan objectives – what the Town is trying to accomplish in terms of redevelopment of this particular area, including provisions for affordable housing, estimates of job retention and creation, and provisions

(existing or proposed) related to density, land coverage, land uses, setbacks, parking, building height, and building bulk.

- » Cost estimates and financing plan – this is to establish cost estimates for property acquisition, demolition, site preparation, relocation expenses, public improvements, and associated “soft costs” (planning, design, engineering, permitting, financing, administration, etc.).
- » Local approvals – evidence of a public hearing and the required municipal approvals along with an opinion from the ARA’s counsel certifying that the proposed urban renewal plan is in compliance with applicable laws.
- » Site preparation – specification of all proposed site preparation, including land protection and how environmental, topographic, and other issues will be handled.
- » Public improvements – specification of the improvements and how they will help achieve the objectives of the plan.
- » A relocation plan conforming to the applicable requirements in MGL c.79A.
- » Redeveloper’s obligation – specification of the obligations which have been or will be imposed on redevelopers to ensure that construction occurs in a timely fashion and in conformance with the plan.
- » Disposition – specification of the proposed disposition of each parcel identified for acquisition by the redevelopment authority and the identity of any known redeveloper.
- » Citizen participation – a report describing the planning process and

citizen participation in preparation of the urban renewal plan, and the expected citizen participation during project implementation. It should be noted that without meaningful citizen participation, the plan will not be approved.

DHCD must make the following findings in order to approve the urban renewal plan:

- » The project area would not, by private enterprise alone and without either government subsidy or the exercise of governmental powers, be made available for urban renewal.
- » The proposed land uses and building requirements will afford maximum opportunity to privately finance urban renewal consistent with the needs of the locality as a whole (i.e. the project will enhance or promote desired private investment).
- » The financial plan is sound.
- » The project area is a decadent area, substandard area, or blighted open area.
- » The urban renewal plan is complete as required under 760 CMR 12.00.
- » The relocation plan is approved under MGL c.79A.

There are other alternatives for enhancing the potential for redevelopment of this important area of Amherst, which can be used instead of or in conjunction with an urban renewal plan. Some examples include:

- » Creation of a new zoning district which allows desired uses by right and establishes flexible standards which can be utilized without additional approvals such as variances. It is

highly recommended that this be done regardless of the establishment of an urban renewal plan. While a form-based code is likely the most desirable format for new regulations, care must be taken to ensure it enhances the potential for redevelopment and any potential developer understands how it works.

- » Designation of one or more parcels as a Priority Development Site under MGL c.43D, although the benefits of doing so may be limited in this case, especially since grant funding for project planning is not included in the state budget at this time. The most significant benefit to designation in this case would be a guarantee to the developer of a 180 day period in which decisions on most local permits must be made. That said, there are ways the Town boards and commissions can work with developers to meet this time frame without having the site designated under c.43D, which is a process requiring approval by the Town Meeting.
- » Pursual of public-private partnerships which in some cases should include the University of Massachusetts as a partner. One example of how such a partnership could work is where a public entity owns a parcel of land and, through a Request for Proposal process, chooses a developer and works closely with them through the design and permitting process. In some cases the developer ultimately purchases the land, and in other cases the land is leased on a long term basis, thus maintaining the partnership in the ensuing years. One advantage of this is that the developer's costs are reduced by not having to purchase the land at the outset if at all, which

particularly in today's economy can make the difference in project feasibility.

- » Continuation of the public dialogue on redevelopment issues in this corridor, including a strong dialogue (which is open to the public) with the University. One of the challenges faced by both the Town and the University is a longstanding distrust of each other's motives and actions, although recent events have apparently started to improve this relationship. The public at large, and the residents of the surrounding neighborhoods in particular, have a stake in the outcome and must be included in all redevelopment discussions. One reason for doing this is to assure potential developers that their proposals, as long as they are in keeping with the Vision and in compliance with revised zoning, will be met with acceptance and not opposition. This can be a strong incentive for potential investors and developers.

CONCLUSION

A preliminary assessment of the Gateway Planning Area was conducted and it concluded that one portion of the study area is likely to be found, upon closer study, to meet the criteria for designation as an urban renewal area. The exact boundaries of a potential urban renewal area still need to be determined, and could include either just the west side of North Pleasant Street or could also include the north side of Phillips Street. As mapped in the alternatives presented in this report, there could be between 10 and 29 parcels within the potential urban renewal area.

As detailed in the primary report for this contract prepared by ACP Visioning & Planning, the Vision for this area is a mixture of residential and limited non-residential uses, with moderate densities and smaller housing units, some with unique features geared toward people with specific needs, such as artists, young professionals, or retirees.

There are various actions the Town and the Amherst Redevelopment Authority can take to achieve the goal of redevelopment in keeping with the Vision created by the charrette participants. Adoption of an urban renewal plan is one tool which may or may not prove to be useful. Given the conditions and parcel characteristics of the potential urban renewal area it may not be necessary to have the ARA acquire property for its redevelopment, but there may be benefits to the availability of funding mechanisms that a redevelopment authority can use for other purposes, such as planning or public infrastructure improvements.

At this point it is premature to either dismiss the idea or embrace it – there may be valid reasons to pursue it, depending on specific projects such as public infrastructure improvements that may be contemplated. That said, it will

require spending additional money to have a detailed assessment done of the area that will potentially be proposed for designation, and a substantial amount of money will be needed to prepare the urban renewal plan itself. The ARA will need to weigh the potential benefits, such as grant, loan, or bond funding for public infrastructure projects (such as new streetscape along the corridor) against the costs involved to obtain approval of an urban renewal plan.

The ultimate goal for the Town of Amherst is to encourage redevelopment of the area, whether designated an urban renewal area or not, by providing the regulatory and economic climate needed to induce private investment in the area. As discussed, this can be accomplished using a variety of techniques, of which MGL c.121B is one which may or may not be practical.

FINANCING TECHNIQUES AND FUNDING SOURCES FOR REDEVELOPMENT

The following paragraphs provide brief descriptions of the most commonly used incentive programs and financing programs for economic development and community redevelopment in Massachusetts towns such as Amherst. Depending on the future land uses desired by the community and subsequently permitted in the zoning, some of these may not be applicable. It is likely that a combination of several of these techniques will be useful to Amherst, potential developers, and potential business owners in what will need to be a joint effort to achieve the goal of redeveloping this Gateway area to meet the vision identified during this project.

The first two sections below deal with funding and financing, while the third section discusses several incentive programs that can increase the probability that development or redevelopment will occur, since they tend to improve financial feasibility of the development project.

Funding Sources The Town Can Pursue:

- » **MassWorks Infrastructure Program:** This program provides a one-stop shop for municipalities and other eligible public entities seeking public infrastructure funding to support economic development and job creation. It is an administrative consolidation of the PWED, CDAG, GDI, MORE, STRAP, and TOD grant programs formerly administered by various state agencies. The intent of MassWorks is to streamline the application process and help applicants maximize potential funding. Rather than applying for a single grant for a project, the Town submits an

application describing the project and the funding needed and the benefits expected from the project, and the state determines which grant or grants are the most appropriate as well as which have the greatest potential for providing the needed funding. The 2011/12 year is the first year of this program, and applications for funding are due between September 1 and 9, 2011.

Funding Sources A Developer Can Pursue:

- » **MassDevelopment Real Estate Financing:** MassDevelopment has numerous real estate financing tools to provide borrowers with access to up to \$5 million for facility acquisition, renovation, construction, and permanent financing. They also provide guarantees to secure a portion of a private real estate loan, providing lenders with incentives to extend credit. MassDevelopment also provides financing for a variety of equipment needs for businesses, which can be crucial for new businesses trying to get started.
- » **Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation (MGCC):** Formerly the MA Community Development Finance Corporation and the Economic Stabilization Trust, the MGCC's mission is to create and preserve jobs at small businesses and women and minority owned businesses, and to promote economic development in certain communities. MGCC provides a centralized resource at the state level that offers working capital, loan guarantees, and targeted technical assistance to solve specific financial and operational problems. The Corporation works with traditional financial institutions to make "un-bankable" loans "bankable"; by working with community development corporations and other non-profits to provide financing for job producing projects, and by assisting a wide range of small businesses to find the growth capital they need.
- » **CDC New England – SBA 504 Loans:** The Small Business Administration 504 Loan Program is a long term financing tool that promotes economic development within a community. The 504 Program provides small businesses with long term, fixed rate financing to acquire major fixed assets such as real estate or machinery. The small business is able to obtain up to 90% financing on these assets.
- » **Investment Tax Credit:** The MA Investment Tax Credit offers credit for qualifying businesses against their state corporate excise tax. This credit may be used to purchase and lease tangible property used in business operations. While not a significant source of funding for real estate development, this tax credit could be useful if there are any small research and development companies interested in partnering with others in the redevelopment of a site within the Amherst Gateway Planning Area.
- » **Western MA Enterprise Fund:** This is a non-profit community loan fund that provides financing and technical assistance to businesses and non-profit organizations that may not qualify for traditional funding. Loans range from \$1,000 to \$150,000 and can be combined with other financing tools on larger projects. They serve businesses and non-profit organizations in western and central

Massachusetts, to stimulate growth and create a stronger and more stable regional economy.

Incentive Opportunities The Town Can Pursue:

- » **Establish a Priority Development Site (MGL c.43D):** Mass. General Laws (MGL) Chapter 43D was signed into law in 2006. This program provides a tool for targeted economic development in municipalities across the state. Specifically, it provides a transparent and efficient process for municipal permitting, guaranteeing decisions on local permits within 180 days, and it increases visibility through marketing of the community and the designated sites. To be designated, sites must be zoned to permit commercial uses (or industrial uses), construction or reconstruction of at least 50,000 square feet GFA, approved by the Town Meeting, and approved by the State Interagency Permitting Board. While grants up to \$60,000 for professional staffing assistance may again be available in the future, currently they are not. There are, however, other benefits as indicated. This program does not provide direct funding, but is a tool which can increase the potential for development or redevelopment of specific sites.
- » **Create a District Improvement Financing district:** District Improvement Financing (DIF) is a public financing alternative available to all cities and towns in the state. Public works, infrastructure, and development projects can be funded by allocating future tax revenues from a predefined district to pay the project costs. The municipality

defines the district and documents a development program describing, among other issues, how the DIF will encourage increased residential, commercial, and industrial activity within the district. It must also detail the project improvements, financing plans, and community benefits. The MA Economic Assistance Coordinating Council reviews and approves the DIF district, after the Town Meeting approves it.

- » **Designate a Tax Increment Financing zone (MGL c.40 s.59):** Tax Increment Financing (TIF) in Massachusetts is a type of public/private partnership where there are negotiated agreements between the private businesses and the municipality to establish a tax exemption on all or part of the increased value accrued as a result of development (the “increment”). The businesses continue to pay full taxes on the base value. The exemption can last from 5 to 20 years, after which the business pays the taxes on the full assessed value. The municipality prepares a TIF Plan which describes the proposed public and private investment in the TIF Zone, and which must be agreed upon by both the municipality and the private owners within the zone.
- » **Establish a Smart Growth zoning district (MGL c.40R):** This statute allows the Town to adopt a Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District, wherein a higher density of residential units are permitted by-right. Mixed use development is also allowed, with commercial or office uses complimenting the residential units. The benefits of establishing a 40R district to the

Town are receipt of incentive payments from the state (at least when the state economy is healthy enough to support them), establishment of enforceable design standards (not to be confused with guidelines), and an increased probability of redevelopment which translates into higher tax revenues from the increased values of the redeveloped properties. While the density requirements may not be suitable for all areas of the Amherst Gateway Planning Area, it may work for the “Frat Row” parcel on North Pleasant Street. This is a zoning amendment and must be adopted by the Town Meeting.

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5. Action Plan

STEPS

The bold vision for the Gateway corridor articulated by community residents and presented in this report is a complex undertaking. It is likely to have a transformative impact on the physical ambiance of the corridor making it a signature place for the Town and a great place for residents and visitors to enjoy.

Implementation will require a coordinated effort that engages the Town of Amherst, the Amherst Redevelopment Authority, the University of Massachusetts, and the public. Strategic implementation steps are listed below. They are divided in two types: policy steps that Town and ARA need to undertake and tactical steps needed to initiate and guide the redevelopment process.

Policy Steps

1. **Adopt the Gateway corridor vision.** Adopting this vision will send an important message to residents, property owners and businesses that the Town is committed to the implementation of the vision and its principles.
Lead: Town, ARA.
Time frame: Short-term.
2. **Make a determination regarding the Urban Renewal Assessment.** ARA should consider the recommendations from the Urban Renewal Assessment—on page 33 of this report—and make a decision on whether to proceed to the next steps of the process. ARA should also

consider the financing techniques and funding sources for redevelopment on page 36 of the report.

Lead: Town, ARA.

Time frame: Short-term.

Tactical Steps

3. **Finalize the transfer of the fraternity houses site to Town.** Redevelopment of the site has the potential to catalyze further redevelopment activities. The Town of Amherst and the University of Massachusetts should finalize the transfer agreement. The Town should then initiate the redevelopment process for the site.
Lead: Town, University of Massachusetts.
Steps: Town staff initiates the transfer process.
Time frame: Short-term.
4. **Conduct “potential” residential market analysis.** An analysis of the potential market for new housing in Amherst will help determine the Town’s for-rent and for-sale housing potential and will indicate the types of housing products that need to be introduced to satisfy that potential market. The results will determine with great specificity the building types and mix likely to succeed in the Gateway corridor. Specifically the study should determine:
 - The depth and breadth of the potential housing market;

- The characteristics of those households likely to move in the Gateway area (this is a critical component of the analysis considering the fact that the plan wants to attract younger singles and couples, empty nesters and retirees, and small families);

- Their housing and lifestyle preferences; and

- The price range of those units.

Lead: Town.

Steps: Planning staff identifies and hires a consultant.

Time frame: Short-term.

5. **Conduct a cost benefits analysis based on the proposed plan.** The cost benefit analysis will determine the cost to the Town of the new development and the fiscal benefits likely to be derived from it. The results will help define the extent of public involvement in the redevelopment process.
Lead: Town.
Steps: Town brings together appropriate agencies to identify infrastructure and other fixed costs and to measure fiscal benefits.
Time frame: Short-term.
6. **Develop a form based code overlay for the project area.** The Town should select a consultant and initiate the zoning process for the corridor. The form based code will establish clear zoning standards that support the vision for Gateway corridor,

including limiting the number of unrelated occupants. It will provide a visual guide to property owners and investors, and ensures that future development, likely to occur over a long period of time, is consistent with the public's vision and plan.

Lead: Town.

Steps: Planning staff initiates the rezoning process.

Time frame: Short-term.

7. **Study the vehicular and pedestrian traffic impacts of new development on the neighborhoods west of the Planning area.** The study should determine the traffic impact of the proposed development to the neighborhoods west of North Pleasant Street and should evaluate the costs and benefits of expanding the street grid between Fearing Street and Massachusetts Avenue.

Lead: Town.

Steps: Town staff conducts traffic counts throughout the neighborhood, coordinates with UMass, works with neighborhoods to identify necessary circulation improvements.

Time frame: Medium-term.

8. **Continue the dialogue with neighborhoods and the community at large.** The Town and the ARA should hold periodic information sharing meetings with the neighborhoods affected by the Gateway corridor vision and the community at large.

Lead: Town.

Steps: Planning staff schedules periodic review meetings with the community during the redevelopment process to seek agreement and support.

Time frame: Ongoing.

9. **Stabilize adjacent neighborhoods.**

The Town should strengthen and stabilize adjacent neighborhoods, with a special emphasis on the Fearing/Phillips/Allen/Nutting neighborhood. This can be accomplished through investment in public infrastructure, increased code enforcement and other compatible measures.

Lead: Town.

Steps: Town staff reviews code enforcement procedures and staffing, brings together appropriate Town agencies to identify infrastructure needs, and conducts review meetings during the redevelopment process.

Time frame: Ongoing.